

Clegg, Brennan

From: Brennan Clegg <bclegg25@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 02, 2018 11:29 AM
To: Clegg, Brennan
Subject: Fwd: BREAKING NEWS: Supreme Court deals blow to public-sector unions

Brennan Clegg
bclegg25@gmail.com
614.202.9235

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From: POLITICO <email@politicoemail.com>
Date: Wed, Jun 27, 2018 at 10:14 AM
Subject: BREAKING NEWS: Supreme Court deals blow to public-sector unions
To: bclegg25@gmail.com

The Supreme Court on Wednesday delivered a severe blow to organized labor, ruling that states can no longer force government workers to pay for the costs of hammering out union contracts.

In a 5-4 decision, the justices ruled that forced collection of so-called agency fees violates public employees' First Amendment right not to back union activity.

Read more [here](#).

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POLITICO

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Clegg, Brennan

From: Brennan Clegg <bclegg25@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 02, 2018 11:36 AM
To: Clegg, Brennan
Subject: Fwd: Rest easy. Your reservation has been confirmed (242082723).

Brennan Clegg
bclegg25@gmail.com
614.202.9235

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Tyler Yapple <yapletyler@gmail.com>
Date: Wed, Apr 26, 2017 at 12:13 PM
Subject: Fwd: Rest easy. Your reservation has been confirmed (242082723).
To: Alyssa Sarko <alyssa.sarko@gmail.com>, Brennan Clegg <bclegg25@gmail.com>

updated lodging for ALEC

Begin forwarded message:

From: The Westin Charlotte
<GCCUSTSERVICE@CONFIRM.STARWOODHOTELS.COM>
Subject: Rest easy. Your reservation has been confirmed (242082723).
Date: April 26, 2017 at 12:11:07 PM EDT
To: "YAPLETYLER@GMAIL.COM" <YAPLETYLER@GMAIL.COM>
Reply-To: "GCCUSTSERVICE@confirm.starwoodhotels.com"
<GCCUSTSERVICE@confirm.starwoodhotels.com>

View in a browser for up-to-date reservation information, or change language

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HOTELS & RESORTS

THE WESTIN CHARLOTTE

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Charlotte, North Carolina 28202 United
States

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Greetings Cliff,

Your reservation is all set – we're excited to welcome you to The Westin Charlotte.

At Westin, we're committed to your well-being. If there's anything you need as we prepare for your arrival, don't hesitate to ask.

Stay Well,

Leo Percopo
GENERAL MANAGER

Confirmation: 242082723

STAY CONNECTED



YOUR RESERVATION

Check In 05-MAY-2017 - 3:00 PM requested *

Check Out 06-MAY-2017 - 12:00 PM requested *

Number of 1

Rooms

Number of 1

Guests

* Indicates requested hotel check-in and check-out times if requested during the reservation. Special requests cannot be guaranteed until check-in. Standard times for this hotel are as follows: check-in: 3:00 PM; check-out: 12:00 PM.

Please do not reply to this e-mail. It is a post-only email and responses will not be monitored. If you need to modify or cancel your reservation, please refer to the disclosure section below for additional instructions.

YOUR ACCOMMODATIONS: ROOM 1 OF 1

Guest Name CLIFF ROSENBERGER

Number of Adults 1

Number of Children 0

Room Description

Traditional Non-smoking: King Bed

- 325 sq ft/30 sq m
- Heavenly Bed And Bath
- Ipod Clock Radio
- 37 Inch Flat Panel Hdtv
- High-speed Internet For A Fee
- Smoke-free

YOUR RATE: ROOM 1 OF 1

Rates for the night of:

05-May-17

Rate Details State Government Rate - ID required. Not valid for

government-contracted vendors
Guests must be government
employees or active military and
must show valid government
identification at check in. Not valid
for government-contracted
vendors.

Room Rate 122.00 in US DOLLARS per night

Taxes

Room rate excludes the following:

State Sales Tax:

7.25 % Per Room / Per Night

Lodging Tax:

8.0 % Per Room / Per Night

Guarantee and Cancellation Policies

Your room is guaranteed with a(n) MASTER CARD
card.

Cancel by 6:00 PM Hotel time 1 days prior to avoid
1 Night penalty. There may be additional applicable
charges and taxes.

Room taxes are included in penalties.

Special Services for All Rooms:

May 05, 2017 - May 06, 2017

Rate Plan: State Government Rate - ID required.

Not valid for government-contracted vendors

ID REQUIRED Per Room/per Stay

Debit and Credit cards will be authorized at check-
in for the amount of your stay, plus an amount to
cover incidentals. Please visit "Announcements" on
the hotel website for more information.

YOUR PRIVACY

If you believe this reservation was made in error, please contact us as soon as possible.

Please note: For security purposes, you will be asked to provide a valid government or state-issued
photo ID at check-in.

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Guarantee Rules

For reservations guaranteed with a form of payment at time of booking, rooms are held until hotel check-out time the day following arrival. For reservations not guaranteed with a form of payment at time of booking, rooms are held until set cancellation time per the rules of the reservation. In the event more guests arrive than can be accommodated due to hotel overbooking or an unforeseen circumstance, and hotel is unable to hold rooms consistent with this room hold policy, hotel will attempt to accommodate guests, at its expense, at a comparable hotel in the area for the oversold night(s), and will pay for transportation to that hotel.

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Under the Breathe Westin® program, we uphold the value of providing wellness throughout your travel and maintain a smoke-free property. All guest rooms, suites, and public spaces inside the buildings are 100% smoke-free. Any smoking in a guest room will result in a \$200 cleaning fee so that the room can be refreshed for the next guest.

Exchange Rate

For non-US hotels, rates confirmed in USD may be converted to local currency by the hotel at your time of stay, based on the exchange rate used by the hotel and are subject to exchange rate fluctuations. Credit card charges are subject to additional currency conversions by banks or credit card companies, which are not within the hotel's control and may impact the amount charged to your credit card. Please contact the hotel if you have any questions.

Rate/Reservation Validity

Please note that electronic reservation confirmations are provided to you solely for your convenience and that we retain official records of our reservation transactions, including details of dates of stay and room rates. In the event of discrepancies, alterations, modifications, or variations between this confirmation and our official records, our official records shall control. Tampering with this confirmation to alter the room rate, or any other reservation information is strictly prohibited and may have legal consequences.

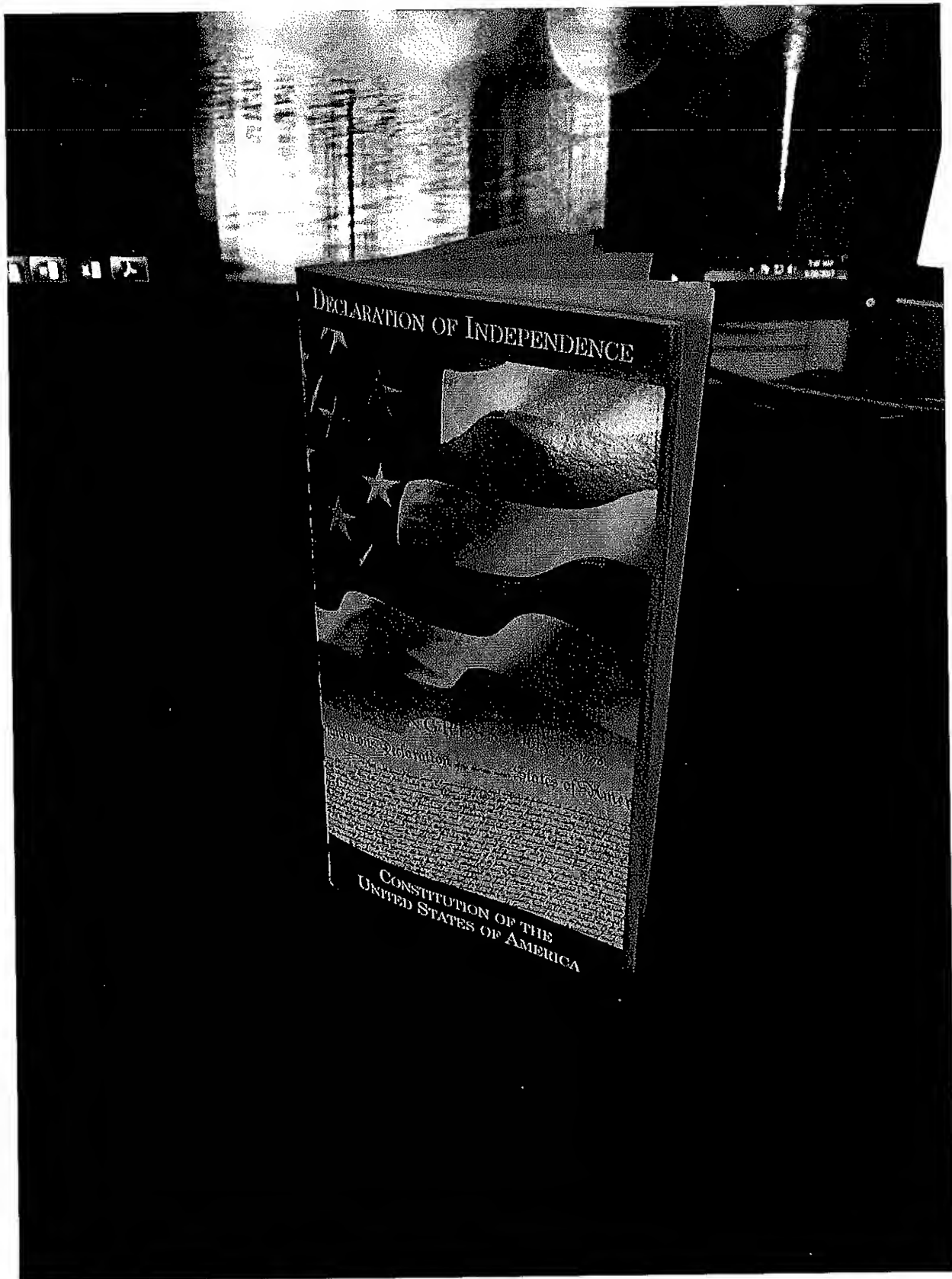
Early Departure

Many Starwood hotels have an early departure fee. When you check-in, you will be asked to confirm your departure date. You may be able to change your departure date without a penalty if your rate plan permits and if you do so before the end of your arrival day. After reconfirming your departure date, if you decide to leave earlier, you may be charged the early departure fee. Please contact the hotel if you have any questions.

EMV/Chip & PIN Credit Card Policy

Please be aware this hotel is EMV/Chip & PIN ready and your credit card's PIN may be necessary for you to check-in to the hotel. If you are not aware of the PIN for your chip credit card, or you are unsure if your card requires a PIN, please contact the financial institution that issued your credit card for clarity and to secure your PIN.

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From: Kaiser Health News
Sent: Tuesday, October 3, 2017 7:01 AM
To: Alexander, Steven
Subject: KHN Morning Briefing: October 3, 2017

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KAISER HEALTH NEWS

Morning Briefing

Tuesday, October 03, 2017

Check Kaiser Health News online for the latest headlines

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From Kaiser Health News:

KAISER HEALTH NEWS ORIGINAL STORIES

- 1. Hepatitis C Drug's Lower Cost Paves Way For Medicaid, Prisons To Expand Treatment**

The drug, sold under the name Mavyret, can cure all six genetic types of the liver disease in eight weeks at a cost of \$26,400, well below other options. (Michelle Andrews, 10/3)

2. Flat-Fee Primary Care Helps Fill Niche For Texas' Uninsured

Doctors offering this care charge a monthly fee for services that can be handled in the office. But patient advocates warn it is not insurance and offers no coverage for hospital or specialist care. (Charlotte Huff, 10/3)

3. Political Cartoon: 'Railroaded?'

Kaiser Health News provides a fresh take on health policy developments with "Political Cartoon: 'Railroaded?'" by Clay Bennett, Chattanooga Times Free Press.

Here's today's health policy haiku:

MEDICARE LESSON: BUYER BEWARE

Heart devices cost
\$1.5 billion.
And they didn't work!

- Anonymous

If you have a health policy haiku to share, please Contact Us and let us know if you want us to include your name. Keep in mind that we give extra points if you link back to a KHN original story.

Summaries Of The News:

PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

4. For Hospitals Tending To Onslaught Of Shooting Victims It Was 'Worst Moment And Proudest Moment'

Las Vegas-area hospitals are prepared and well equipped to deal with traumas, but Sunday's mass shooting was unlike any they'd seen before.

The New York Times: Controlled Chaos At Las Vegas Hospital Trauma Center After Attack

On Sunday night, Toni Mullan drove 110 miles an hour on side streets from home to get back to University Medical Center of Southern Nevada, where she had just worked a 12-hour shift as a clinical supervisor in the trauma resuscitation department. Her car was smoking as she pulled into a three-hour parking spot close to the trauma center. Ms. Mullan, 54, left her hazard lights blinking as she shut the car door and raced inside. (Fink, 10/2)

The Wall Street Journal: Las Vegas Hospitals Face Range Of Serious Traumas
Hospitals in Las Vegas are grappling with a range of patient injuries that reflect the chaos of Sunday evening's mass shooting, including horrific gunshot wounds and traumas inflicted as victims tried to flee. Local hospitals called in extra staff as well as medical personnel from a nearby Air Force base to cope with the onslaught, as authorities on Monday reported at least 59 deaths and more than 527 wounded from the tragedy outside the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino. (Whalen and Caldwell, 10/2)

NPR: Las Vegas Hospitals Call In Reinforcements To Care For Shooting Victims
Hospitals across the Las Vegas area were inundated Sunday evening when hundreds of people injured in the mass shooting at a country music festival on the Strip arrived at their doors by ambulances and private car. And hundreds of doctors, nurses, and support personnel were called into work to help handle the patients that were lined up in ambulance bays and hallways, officials say. (Kodjak, 10/2)

Modern Healthcare: Hospitals Lean On Practice To Treat Mass Shootings
Las Vegas hospitals have likely implemented similar emergency preparedness protocols as they treat the roughly 515 people who were wounded Sunday night in the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history, which has left at least 58 people dead as of Monday afternoon. University Medical Center, the only Level 1 trauma center in Nevada, has treated 104 individuals who were wounded when a lone gunman opened fire on a concert crowd on the Las Vegas strip. More than 30 patients were treated in the free-standing trauma center approximately 6 miles from the country music festival's location. Four patients were pronounced dead at the facility, UMC spokeswoman Danita Cohen told the media. (Castellucci, 10/2)

Modern Healthcare: Hospital Emergency Rooms Saw More Than 700,000 Shooting Victims Last Decade

As hospitals in Las Vegas deal with hundreds of shooting victims, a new study finds

that gun violence sent more than 700,000 patients to emergency rooms in less than a decade. Those visits resulted in nearly \$25 billion spent in healthcare over that period. Local officials reported that hospitals in Las Vegas were treating 515 casualties and that 58 people were dead after a gunman opened fire from the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Resort Hotel late Sunday night. Firearm-related injuries accounted for 25.3 emergency department visits for every 100,000 people between 2006 and 2014, according to an analysis of government data published Monday in Health Affairs and released to the press on an embargo before Sunday's shooting. (Johnson, 10/2)

Kansas City Star: Las Vegas Shooting Prompts Question: Is Kansas City's Health System Ready?

No individual ambulance service or hospital in the Kansas City metro area could handle the aftermath of a mass shooting on the scale of what happened in Las Vegas Sunday night, where more than 50 people were killed and more than 500 were injured. (Marso, 10/2)

The Baltimore Sun: Shot At Las Vegas Concert, Arundel High Grad Loses Eye, Remains In Coma

When a lone gunman with automatic rifles opened fire on the crowd below, Tina Frost, a 2008 graduate of Arundel High, was among the more than 520 people wounded early Monday morning in the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history. Fifty-nine people were killed. Late Monday, Becky Frost said her 27-year-old sister had lost her right eye and was in a Las Vegas intensive care unit after a two-hour surgery. (Cox, 10/2)

5. Mass Shootings Are A 'Serious Public Health Issue,' Doctors Group Says

The American College of Physicians is calling on Congress to address the issue immediately. But while Democrats are calling for gun control action in the wake of the Las Vegas shooting, Republicans have been quiet on the issue.

The Hill: Leading Doctors Group Calls For Automatic Weapons Ban After Las Vegas Shooting

The American College of Physicians issued a statement Monday labeling mass shootings a "serious public health issue" and calling for a ban on automatic and semiautomatic weapons in the wake of the mass shooting in Las Vegas. "We must acknowledge that lack of a U.S. policy to address gun violence is the reason we have much higher rates of injuries and deaths from firearms violence than other countries,"

the group said in a statement. Specifically, we call for a ban on the sale and ownership of automatic and semiautomatic weapons." (Carter, 10/2)

Reuters: After Las Vegas Massacre, Democrats Urge Gun Laws; Republicans Silent
Sunday's massacre in Las Vegas spurred a ritual-like response from U.S. politicians following the mass shootings that have left a trail of victims across the country: Democrats renewed demands for tougher gun laws while Republicans offered up prayers but showed no signs of supporting such legislation. (Cowan, Cornwell, Holland and Tuppper, 10/2)

And —

Los Angeles Times: GOP Still Plans To Vote On NRA-Backed Legislation That Eases Gun Restrictions
Congress has been unable, or unwilling, to approve gun control legislation after recent mass shootings — including one targeting lawmakers playing baseball — and it is unlikely to consider new bills after the attack in Las Vegas. To the contrary, House Republicans are on track to advance legislation easing firearms rules, including a package of bills backed by the National Rifle Assn. that would make it easier to purchase silencers. (Mascaro, 10/2)

6. In 2016 Election, Communities With Poor Public Health Tended To Shift Vote To Trump

Some experts warn not to read too much into the study, which could be a result of too much data dredging. But the authors say it makes sense.

Stat: In Sicker Communities, Trump Got More Votes. Is That Why He Won?
The worse a community's health the more strongly its voters backed Donald Trump in the 2016 election compared to their support for Mitt Romney, the 2012 Republican presidential nominee, researchers reported on Monday. The findings suggest that public health "might influence" how people vote, said Dr. Jason Wasfy of Massachusetts General Hospital, who led the study, which looked at factors such as death rates, diabetes prevalence, and teen pregnancy. "The communities that shifted from Romney to Trump in general have worse public health." (Begley, 10/2)

Bloomberg: Study Finds Poor Health Tied To Votes For Trump In 2016 Election
Everybody has a theory about how Donald Trump defied the polls and won the U.S. presidential election. The latest: health. There is a "substantial association" between measures of poor public health and shifts toward Trump in last November's balloting, from voting patterns in the 2012 election, according to a paper

from researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital at Harvard Medical School and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Department of Political Science, published Monday in the journal PLOS ONE. (Shanker, 10/2)

7. Congress Asked To Overrule Outdated Medicaid Regulation On Funding For Opioid Treatment Centers

Only smaller facilities qualify for Medicaid payments under a 1965 law that was intended to break up large, state-run mental asylums, but state attorneys general are asking Congress, in the midst of a crisis, to expand that. In other news, the National Institutes of Health, noting a lack of evidence on the issue, will begin to study opioids' effects on babies.

The Associated Press: State Attorneys General Seek More Beds For Drug Treatment
A bipartisan coalition of state attorneys general on Monday called on Congress to allow Medicaid funding to flow to larger drug treatment centers, potentially expanding the number of addicts who can get help as the nation grapples with an overdose crisis. The government lawyers for 38 states and Washington, D.C., sent a letter to congressional leaders requesting the change. They say it's needed to help fight the opioid abuse and overdose epidemic, which continues to claim tens of thousands of lives a year. (Mulvihill, 10/2)

The Hill: NIH To Study Babies Affected By Opioids

The National Institutes of Health is funding a new study on babies born with opioid withdrawal syndrome, a side effect of the nation's epidemic of prescription painkillers and heroin. The number of newborns with this syndrome has increased in recent years, yet there's a lack of standard, evidence-based treatments for providers, according to an NIH press release announcing the new study on Monday. (Roubein, 10/2)

In other news from the states —

The Wall Street Journal: New Jersey Cracks Down On Drug Dealers For Opioid Deaths
Less than four months after New Jersey resident MaryAnn McKinnon died of an overdose, police arrested the man accused of selling the opioids that killed her. Cleveland Spencer, 26, of Paterson, N.J., was charged in late September with four drug offenses, the most serious of which was a felony alleging he sold the drugs that resulted in Ms. McKinnon's death. (King, 10/2)

Cleveland Plain Dealer: MetroHealth Receives \$1.9M Grant To Increase Naloxone Distribution By Law Enforcement

With the help of a new \$1.9 million federal grant, the MetroHealth System aims to

ensure that at least 95 percent of law enforcement agencies across Cuyahoga County carry and distribute the opioid overdose-reversal drug naloxone by January of 2019. (Zeltner, 10/2)

8. Big Tobacco To Begin Running Court-Mandated Mea Culpa Ads

"Altria, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco, Lorillard, and Philip Morris USA intentionally designed cigarettes to make them more addictive," one ad will say. Another reads: "More people die every year from smoking than from murder, AIDS, suicide, drugs, car crashes, and alcohol, combined." In other public health news: the importance of body clocks, help getting sober and children with anxiety.

The Wall Street Journal: Big Tobacco To Spend Millions On Self-Critical Ads In U.S. Broadcast television networks and metro newspapers are about to get a boost from an unexpected but familiar source: Big Tobacco. It's an old media buy to resolve an old fight. Starting as soon as next month, Altria Group Inc. and British American Tobacco PLC will begin running court-mandated ads to put to rest a lawsuit brought nearly two decades ago by the U.S. Department of Justice over misleading statements the industry had made about cigarettes and their health effects. (Maloney, 10/3)

Richmond Times-Dispatch: Altria, Other Tobacco Companies Will Run 'Corrective Statements,' Starting In November

Starting in advertisements in late November, Henrico County-based Altria Group Inc. and other major U.S. cigarette companies will publish a series of statements about the health risks of smoking. The court-ordered "corrective statements" are set to run on television and in newspapers as part of an agreement reached in an 18-year-old federal lawsuit that accused cigarette-makers of deceiving the public. (Reid Blackwell, 10/2)

NPR: Messing With Our Body Clocks Causes Weight Gain And Diabetes

Research that helped discover the clocks running in every cell in our bodies earned three scientists a Nobel Prize in medicine on Monday. "With exquisite precision, our inner clock adapts our physiology to the dramatically different phases of the day," the Nobel Prize committee wrote of the work of Jeffrey C. Hall, Michael Rosbash and Michael W. Young. "The clock regulates critical functions such as behavior, hormone levels, sleep, body temperature and metabolism." (Aubrey, 10/2)

The Associated Press: Trying To Get Sober? NIH Offers Tool To Help Find Good Care
The phone calls come — from fellow scientists and desperate strangers — with a single question for the alcohol chief at the National Institutes of Health: Where can my loved one find good care to get sober? Tuesday, the government is releasing a novel online

tool to help 30 directories of alcohol treatment providers paired with key questions patients should ask for a better shot at high-quality care. (Neergaard, 10/3)

NPR: For Children With Severe Anxiety, Medication Plus Therapy Work Best
Teens and children struggling with anxiety are often prescribed medication or therapy to treat their symptoms. For many, either drugs or therapy is enough, but some young people can't find respite from anxious thoughts. For them, a study suggests that using both treatments at once can help. The study, published in the Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology on Monday, analyzed data from a large clinical trial of 488 people ages 7 to 17 diagnosed with anxiety disorders. The trial compared therapy, an anti-depressant called sertraline (brand name Zoloft), the combination of both, and a placebo. Pfizer, which manufactures Zoloft, donated both the sertraline and the placebo pills to the study. (Chen, 10/2)

ADMINISTRATION NEWS

9. Chatter Over Next HHS Chief Includes A Strident Opponent Of ACA, A Pragmatist And An Obama Holdover

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Chief Seema Verma and Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Scott Gottlieb are two of the top names that keep coming up. But others -- like Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and former Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal -- are also in the mix.

The Hill: Price Resignation Sets Off Frenzy Of Speculation Over Replacement
The resignation of embattled Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price for using of private jets for government travel is setting off a frenzy of speculation about who will replace him. While it's still early, health policy insiders see two current officials as perhaps the most likely candidates: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Seema Verma and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Scott Gottlieb. (Sullivan, 10/3)

Modern Healthcare: Conservatives Put Gottlieb, Jindal At Top Of List To Head HHS
Exactly how long Dr. Don Wright occupies the top spot at HHS is anyone's guess, but conservative policy insiders have wasted little time in compiling a wish list of candidates to become the department's next permanent secretary. Wright was temporarily anointed to the post when Dr. Tom Price abruptly resigned late last week. As Congress struggled to repeal the Affordable Care Act, hope has fallen on HHS as the avenue from which conservative healthcare reform will take place. Besides overseeing a

department that accounts for nearly one-quarter of all federal spending, the secretary has tremendous latitude in shaping program under the ACA. (Dickson, 10/2)

Politico Pro: Why Price's Conservative Imprint On HHS Is Likely To Endure
Tom Price may be gone as HHS secretary, but his efforts to put a conservative stamp on the \$1.1 trillion agency, from promoting faith groups to scrapping Obamacare implementation, are likely to move forward without him. A "draft strategic plan" for HHS, published before Price resigned last week, references "faith" or "faith-based" organizations more than 40 times in its five-year statement of priorities. (Demko, Pittman and Ehley, 10/2)

PHARMACEUTICALS

10. Gottlieb Says FDA Is Encouraging Production Of Complex Generic Drugs To Bring Down Prices

The head of the Food and Drug Administration says in a blog post that his agency will provide guidance to drugmakers on how to win approvals for these medications that are especially hard to make. In congressional testimony, he also says the agency supports "right-to-try" legislation that allows people with serious illnesses access to experimental drugs, but he would like the measure to apply only to people with terminal diseases.

The Associated Press: FDA Acts To Encourage Generic Competition For Complex Drugs

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is opening a new front in its efforts to reduce high drug prices by encouraging development of generic versions of hard-to-make medicines. Complex drugs and drug-device combinations generally are very expensive and some are widely used. Often, they don't get generic competition right after their patent expires, as happens routinely with pills. (Johnson, 10/2)

The Hill: FDA Chief Says Agency Will Take Action To Lower Drug Prices

The Food and Drug Administration will take action to deal with the rising cost of prescription drugs, the agency's head said on Monday. FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb said high drug prices are "a public health concern that FDA should address." (Weixel, 10/2)

Politico Pro: FDA Chief Recommends Changes To 'Right To Try'

FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb in prepared congressional testimony for Tuesday morning notes the White House supports broadening patient access to experimental

medicines via "right to try legislation," but he also suggests ways to narrow the Senate-passed bill so it would apply only to patients with terminal illness. (Karlin-Smith, 10/2)

11. Shire Files Anti-Trust Suit Against Allergan: 'There Was Not A Level Playing Field'

Shire says it offered discounts to Medicare Part D plans, but the program refused due to Allergan's "bundled discounts, exclusive dealing" and other tactics.

The Wall Street Journal: Shire Alleges Allergan Blocked Drug From Medicare Contracts
Shire PLC filed an antitrust suit against Allergan PLC, alleging Allergan's contracts with Medicare Part D drug plans for its Restasis eye drops effectively blocked access to Shire's rival drug. The complaint, filed Monday in federal court in Newark, N.J., says Shire offered steep discounts in bids to secure insurance coverage of the company's dry-eye drug Xiidra but the Part D plans refused, due to Allergan's "bundled discounts, exclusive dealing" and other tactics. (Rockoff, 10/2)

Stat: The U.S. Would Pay An Extra \$10.7 Billion Without Generic Allergan Drug
Ever since Allergan (AGN) struck an unusual deal last month to sell patents for the Restasis eye treatment to a Native American tribe, the drug maker has been accused of using a clever legal tactic to forestall low-cost generic competition to a big-selling product. Now, one organization is attempting to quantify the potential cost to the U.S. health care system, and the number is a whopper — Americans would pay an extra \$10.7 billion if a generic version of Restasis is unavailable between 2018 and 2024, when the existing patents on the medicine are due to expire. (Silverman, 10/2)

CAPITOL HILL WATCH

12. Worried About CHIP Funding Stalled In Congress, State Officials Start Drawing Up Plan Bs

Although Congress missed a deadline to renew funding for the popular program that provides health care for children, money won't run out for the states until the end of the year. Officials, however, are already concerned about the impact the uncertainty of it all will have.

Politico: States Rush To Preserve Children's Health Coverage

States are scrambling to shore up the government health insurance program that covers 9 million low-income kids after Congress failed to meet the deadline to renew its funding over the weekend. A number of state officials are looking for ways to keep their

programs afloat, hoping Congress will approve money for the federal Children's Health Insurance Program before they have to cut off coverage. (Ehley, 10/2)

The Washington Post: House Republicans Propose Puerto Rico Funding As Part Of CHIP Bill

Republicans on a leading House health-care committee are proposing to send \$1 billion in extra Medicaid funding to Puerto Rico as it deals with severe hurricane damage, as part of a five-year plan to fund the federal health insurance program for children. The proposal from the House Energy and Commerce Committee, provided Monday night to The Washington Post, would be paid for with a bucket of items, including raising Medicare rates for wealthier seniors, redirecting dollars from the Affordable Care Act's prevention fund and shortening a grace period for enrollees who don't pay their premiums. (Winfield Cunningham, 10/2)

The Philadelphia Inquirer/Philly.com: Q & A: Congress Let The Children's Health Insurance Program Expire. What Now For Pa. And N.J. Kids?

The picture varies from state to state, depending on local support. However, a New Jersey state human services agency spokeswoman said benefits for Garden State children should be covered until sometime this spring. Pennsylvania was one of 10 states national experts thought might run out of funds by end of this year. However, according to a state human services spokeswoman, coverage for Pennsylvania's children should be secure until February 2018. (Giordano, 10/3)

Denver Post: Congress Doesn't Renew Federal Program, Putting Health Coverage Of 75,000 Colorado Children In Jeopardy

Congress just let expire federal funding for a program that provides low-cost health insurance to 9 million children, at least 75,000 of whom live in Colorado. Colorado officials said they still have enough unspent federal aid to continue the program through the end of January, but if the program is not renewed by then many children will not be able to see their doctor or get their immunizations. The Children's Health Insurance Program also currently provides insurance to 800 pregnant women in Colorado, state officials said. (Osher and Matthews, 10/2)

Texas Tribune: Almost 400,000 Texans' Insurance At Risk After Congress Fails To Renew CHIP

Insurance coverage for more than 390,000 Texas children and pregnant women is in jeopardy after Congress failed to renew authorization for a federal program. Congressional authorization for the Children's Health Insurance Program, which provides low-cost health insurance for children from low- and middle-income families, expires Sept. 30. (Choi and Livingston, 10/2)

WOMEN'S HEALTH

13. Republicans Say That Planned Parenthood Clinics Are Mostly In Urban Areas. That's Not Quite True.

Roughly half of the organization's clinics are located in areas that are rural, or are federally designated as medically underserved or health professional shortage areas. In other women's health news: a conservative group urges Congress to vote on a bill to ban abortions after 20 weeks, an appeals court has a change of heart about Missouri abortion restrictions, and more.

The Washington Post: Are Most Planned Parenthood Clinics In Urban Areas Where Women Have Adequate Access To Care?

With the House planning to vote Oct. 3 on an antiabortion bill, we dug into this common talking point by opponents of abortion rights. During a recent health-care debate on CNN, a woman asked about the provision in the Senate's most recent Affordable Care Act repeal bill that would restrict federal funding to Planned Parenthood. The woman said a Planned Parenthood cancer screening in her mid-20s found ovarian cysts and benign tumors, and criticized the bill for blocking health care for women, "especially for those who live in the many parts of this country that are not served by community health centers." (Lee, 10/3)

The Hill: Heritage To 'Key Vote' 20-Week Abortion Bill

An influential conservative group is pushing House Republicans to vote in favor of a bill that would ban abortions after 20 weeks. Heritage Action for America said it will "key vote" the "Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act," which comes up for a vote in the House Tuesday. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Trent Franks (R-Ariz.), would make it a crime to perform or attempt an abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy. Penalties would include a fine, up to five years in prison, or both. (Hellmann, 10/2)

KCUR: Federal Appeals Court Changes Mind And Blocks Missouri Abortion Restrictions

There was another twist Monday in the roller-coaster case brought by Planned Parenthood seeking to block two Missouri abortion restrictions. After a federal appeals court last month decided to lift an injunction blocking the restrictions from taking effect, the same court has now had a change of heart. In a one-sentence order Monday afternoon, five of the nine judges on the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decided to leave the injunction in place after all. (Margolies, 10/2)

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Boston Globe: Mass. Insurers To Back Free Birth Control Legislation
Massachusetts health insurers and reproductive rights advocates have negotiated a compromise bill that would protect free birth control coverage even if the Trump administration strikes that requirement from federal law, as expected. (Ebbert, 10/3)

KCUR: As Rural Counties Lose Obstetrics, Women Give Birth Far From Home
Pemiscot is part of a trend in obstetrics unit closures. According to research published this month in Health Affairs, 179 rural hospitals closed their obstetrics units between 2004 and 2014. Katy Kozhimannil, director of research at the University of Minnesota's Rural Health Research Center, which conducted the study, says there are many reasons rural delivery units become too costly to keep around. Medicaid, for example, pays hospitals much less for child delivery than private insurance does. And Medicaid pays for more than half of all rural births — compared to about 40 percent in urban parts of the United States. (Sable-Smith, 10/2)

MEDICAID

14. Supporters Of Medicaid Expansion In Utah File Initial Paperwork To Get It On The 2018 Ballot

If the wording for the referendum passes muster, the supporters must still hold public hearings and gather 113,000 signatures to put the measure before the voters.

Deseret News: Full Medicaid Expansion A Step Closer To Being Decided By Utah Voters

Supporters of full Medicaid expansion in Utah officially filed an application Monday at the state Capitol to take the issue to voters in 2018. The campaign, Utah Decides Healthcare, is pushing for Medicaid eligibility for tens of thousands of Utahns who do not qualify for all-important tax credits on health insurance plans offered on the federal exchange. (Lockhart, 10/2)

Salt Lake Tribune: Backers File Paperwork To Put Utah Medicaid Expansion On 2018 Ballot

The measure would fully expand Medicaid to low-income individuals and family that currently earn too much to qualify yet not enough to afford other coverage under the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare. If Lt. Gov. Spencer Cox approves the initiative's wording, the campaign must then hold seven public hearings across the state and collect more than 113,000 signatures from registered voters to earn a spot on the November 2018 ballot. (Gifford, 10/2)

STATE WATCH

15. New York Governor, NYC Mayor Bicker Publicly Over Hospital Funding

Congress let payments to Disproportionate Share Hospital expire on Sunday, which results in about a \$1.1 billion loss for New York's neediest hospitals. Gov. Andrew Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's office took to Twitter to air grievances over funding for the city's municipal public hospital system.

The New York Times: With Federal Cuts To Hospitals, Cuomo Suggests New York City Step Up

After weeks of warning about its possible consequences, a federal cut to New York's hospitals took effect on Sunday, adding stress to the state's already overworked public health care system. The cut came as a result of a lack of action by Congress on so-called Disproportionate Share Hospital payments, known as D.S.H., which are federal funds that help hospitals cover the cost of serving poor and uninsured patients. Under the Affordable Care Act, those funds were supposed to be reduced as more patients received insurance coverage. (McKinley, 10/2)

In other hospital news —

Stat: Texas Hospitals Feeling The Long-Term Financial Strains Of Harvey
Texas hospitals canceled surgeries, evacuated patients, and closed for days because of Hurricane Harvey. They sank millions of dollars into not caring for patients as a measure of precaution. More than a month after Harvey made landfall, administrators at the roughly two dozen hospitals that evacuated in the eastern part of the state have now reopened their doors to patients. But some may feel the financial burdens of the storm for months to come — both caring for more patients who can't afford treatment, while also seeing patients postpone the more lucrative elective surgeries that are many hospitals' moneymakers. (Blau, 10/3)

The Philadelphia Inquirer/Philly.com: Why Five Philly-Area Hospitals Lost In-Network Status With IBC Plans

Independence Blue Cross' contract offer to Tower Health on Friday, the day Tower completed its acquisition of Brandywine Hospital, Chestnut Hill Hospital, Jennersville Regional Hospital, Phoenixville Hospital, and Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, contained what was effectively a poison pill, Clint Matthews, president and chief executive of Tower Health, said Monday. "The issue that has come between us is the

clause that we would not compete with a health plan” in territory served by IBC, Matthews said. (Brubaker, 10/2)

Boston Globe: Federal Probe Found Lapses At Psychiatric Hospitals
The federal government threatened to stop Medicare payments to three Massachusetts psychiatric hospitals last month, citing safety lapses that caused two mentally ill patients to go without critical medicines for days. One of the patients had a seizure and fell, suffering a traumatic head injury, as a result. (Kowalczyk, 10/3)

16. State Highlights: Md. Officials Give Customers Early Look At Exchange Plans; Infants Airlifted To Fla. Hospital After Hurricane

Media outlets report on news from Maryland, Florida, Texas and Georgia.

The Baltimore Sun: Maryland Health Exchange Opens Website For Browsing Plans
With consumers facing a shorter period to enroll in health insurance under the Affordable Care Act, Maryland health exchange officials have opened their online marketplace so residents can get an early look at the costs of plans, which are expected to be higher this year. Open enrollment starts Nov. 1 and lasts until Dec. 15 — 45 days down from three months last year. ...About 150,000 Marylanders bought private plans last year through the exchange and others bought directly from insurers, mostly people who do not get insurance through their employers. Many more enrolled in Medicaid, the federal insurance program for low-income residents, which was expanded under the health law. (Cohn and McDaniels, 10/2)

Miami Herald: Infants From Puerto Rico Get Heart Surgery At Nicklaus Children's
Three of the smallest and most frail Puerto Ricans made it through the worst of Hurricane Maria hunkered down in a hospital where the windows shattered, the water rushed in, and the power went out. It was the aftermath that nearly killed them — and the serendipity of professional networking that rescued the three newborns from the storm-wracked island, and brought them to Miami's Nicklaus Children's Hospital for emergency heart surgeries within 48 hours of the hurricane's landfall in Puerto Rico. (Chang, 10/2)

Kaiser Health News: Flat-Fee Primary Care Helps Fill Niche For Texas' Uninsured
Darrell Kenyon had been punting for years on various medical issues — fatigue, headaches, mood swings. The 43-year-old uninsured carpenter was particularly worried about his blood pressure, which ran high when he checked it at the grocery store. Then he heard about a different type of physician practice, one that provided regular primary care for a monthly fee. (Huff, 10/3)

Nashville Tennessean: Florida Medical Call Center Operator Bringing 200 Jobs To Spring Hill

A Florida-based provider of medical answering services plans this month to open a location in Spring Hill that will house roughly 200 call center agents and triage nurses. The 15,000-square-foot facility at the Workforce Development & Conference Center at Northfield will be the third business location for Delray Beach-based Call 4 Health, which also operates a call center in Linthicum Heights, Maryland. (Ward, 10/2)

Atlanta Journal-Constitution: Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed Said He Will Review New Pot Legislation

Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed said late Monday he will review and sign new legislation that changes penalties on possession of small amounts of marijuana. ...The Atlanta City Council on Monday passed legislation that reduces the penalty for possessing an ounce or less of pot in the city from \$1,000 to \$75 and eliminates jail time under those circumstances. (Stafford, 10/2)

Miami Herald: Medical Marijuana Grower Pushes Florida To Set Rules For Edibles
One of the state's largest cultivators and distributors of medical marijuana is pushing the Florida Department of Health to set rules that would allow thousands of cannabis patients to eat their medicine. (Smiley, 10/2)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

17. Viewpoints: Placing Blame For Fla.'s Hurricane Nursing Home Deaths; The Problems With Paying Medical Bills

A selection of opinions on health care from around the country.

Miami Herald: Negligence - Yes, But Also Legislative Cowardice To Blame For Nursing Home Deaths

It's not a mere oversight that Florida nursing homes and assisted-living facilities aren't required to have generators for air-conditioning units. That's how the industry wanted it. Generators, as you know, are expensive. And it's not as if lawmakers didn't comprehend that a massive hurricane blackout might expose ailing seniors to life-threatening heat and dehydration. Everyone knew, but few had the spine to take on the Florida Health Care Association, the powerful nursing-home lobby. Some tried, though. An autopsy of their past efforts was depressingly recounted in The Herald following the tragedy in Hollywood Hills. (Carl Hiaasen, 9/29)

Axios: The Medical Bill Score: How The Public Judges Health Care

We track a lot of numbers in health care: how much we spend on health as a share of our economy; the number of uninsured; and the share of the federal budget allocated to health programs. What we don't track — and a number the Congressional Budget Office cannot score — is the statistic that means the most to the American people: the share of the public having problems paying their health care bills. (Drew Altman, 10/3)

The Washington Post: I'm Dying Of Brain Cancer. I Prepared To End My Life. Then I Kept Living.

In April 2015, at the age of 55, I was diagnosed with one of the most lethal and aggressive brain tumors, a brainstem glioblastoma multiforme in an advanced stage. The prognosis was both grim and precise: Without treatment, I might have a few months; with treatment, I could last six months. If I beat overwhelming odds, I'd toast the new year one last time. (Jeffrey Davitz, 9/29)

Stat: Breast Cancer Is Important, But So Are Other Cancers

I won't be wearing pink this month, or taking part in a breast cancer walk, or donating money to breast cancer research. It's not that I don't think beating breast cancer is a good cause. It is. I believe that to my core. Money raised by breast cancer charities has increased screening and funded important research. It has saved lives, including those of people I know and love. My issue is that the amazing job that breast cancer charities have done raising funds and awareness has exacted a heavy toll on awareness and fundraising opportunities for other types of cancer — like colorectal cancer, the one I am currently living with. (Tamlyn Oliver, 10/2)

Georgia Health News: It's Our Goal To Make Fresh, Healthy Food An Everyday Affair
Though summer is over, the "season" for local, farm-fresh food is still in full swing. And while affluent foodies in Georgia have an abundance of local produce options nearly year-round, these options are sometimes not feasible for those who live at or below the poverty line. (Sara Berney, 10/2)

The New York Times: What Makes Singapore's Health Care So Cheap?

Singapore's health care system is distinctive, and not just because of the improbability that it's admired by many on both the American left and the right. It spends less of its economy on health care than any country that was included in our recent tournament on best health systems in the world. (Aaron E. Carroll and Austin Frakt, 10/2)

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Morning Briefing

Monday, October 30, 2017

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NOTE TO READERS

QUESTIONS ABOUT OBAMACARE SIGN-UP SEASON? Tune in to KHN= 2s next Facebook Live to learn all you need to know about this year= 2s Affordable Care Act open-enrollment period. The chat will be **Thursday, Nov. 2, at 3 p.m., ET**. You can send questions here and watch here.

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2. Big Gains In Latino Coverage Poised To Slip During Chaotic Enrollment Season
3. Money For Health Law Navigators Slashed — Except Where It's Not
4. Rural Areas — Already Short On Health Resources — Face Enrollment Hitches
5. Political Cartoon: 'Second Chance?'

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From Kaiser Health News:

KAISER HEALTH NEWS ORIGINAL STORIES

1. Flurry Of Federal And State Probes Target Insulin Drugmakers And Pharma Middlemen

Over the past two years, a powerful federal prosecutor and several state attorneys general have launched investigations related to diabetes drugs. (Sarah Jane Tribble, 10/30)

2. Big Gains In Latino Coverage Poised To Slip During Chaotic Enrollment Season

Efforts in past years have cut uninsured rates among Hispanics from 43 to 25 percent, but navigators say they anticipate a challenging sign-up period. (Paula Andalo, 10/30)

3. Money For Health Law Navigators Slashed — Except Where It's Not

Two states, North and South Carolina, have very different outlooks since the Trump administration cut funding for the people who help others sign up for health insurance. (Alexandra Olgin, WFAE, 10/30)

4. Rural Areas — Already Short On Health Resources — Face Enrollment Hitches

Affordable Care Act supporters in Georgia say they are facing a daunting task in getting people signed up for health insurance. (Virginia Anderson, 10/27)

5. Political Cartoon: 'Second Chance?'

Kaiser Health News provides a fresh take on health policy developments with "Political Cartoon: 'Second Chance?'" by John Deering.

Here's today's health policy haiku:

INSULIN MANUFACTURERS IN THE HOT SEAT

As the drug's cost soars,
Some officials want to know
The answers to "Why?"

- Anonymous

If you have a health policy haiku to share, please Contact Us and let us know if you want us to include your name. Keep in mind that we give extra points if you link back to a KHN original story.

Summaries Of The News:

HEALTH LAW

6. Health Law's Open Enrollment To Kick Off This Week Amid Confusion, Cries Of Sabotage

Experts expect enrollment to drop significantly in part because of the Trump administration's moves to slash funding for marketing and navigators, and to roll back policies meant to protect consumers.

The Associated Press: Health Law Sign-Ups Start, And Some See A 'Hostile Takeover'
It's sign-up season for the Affordable Care Act, but the Trump administration isn't making it easy — cutting the enrollment period in half, slashing advertising and dialing back on counselors who help consumers get through the process. Many people already faced fewer choices and higher premiums. But President Donald Trump's decision to

cancel a subsidy to insurers that lowers consumer costs compounded the turmoil, pushing premiums even higher. (Alonso-Zaldivar, 10/30)

Politico: Confusion Clouds Open Enrollment With Republicans Still Eager To Dismantle Obamacare

Obamacare is about to have its worst open-enrollment season ever — and that's no accident. President Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress still aim to dismantle the 2010 law. Making it look bad helps their cause, even as they've failed repeatedly to repeal or replace Obamacare. The new theory for Republicans: If fewer people enroll in Obamacare, there will be less of a constituency to save it. (Demko, Pradhan and Cancryn, 10/29)

The Hill: ObamaCare Heads Into Crucial First Sign-Ups Under Trump

ObamaCare made it through nearly 10 months of repeal attempts with Republicans in full control of Washington. It now faces another crucial period starting Wednesday. It's the first test of how the Trump administration will handle enrollment under the law it claims is "imploding." With the president making no secret of his desire to kill the law completely, Democrats accuse the administration of "sabotage" and say the number of new enrollees is likely to drop as a result. (Sullivan, 10/29)

NPR: Less Money, Less Time To Enroll In 2018 Health Plans Poses Challenges

Starting next week, Americans will again be able to shop for health plans on the Affordable Care Act marketplaces. Open enrollment in most states runs from Nov. 1 through Dec. 15. But a lot of people don't know that because the Trump administration slashed the marketing budget for Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare. So states, municipalities, community groups, insurers and others are strengthening their outreach efforts. In Texas, some cities and local governments are doing their best to get the word out, but it will be hard to reach the more rural communities. (Lopez and Dembosky, 10/28)

Kaiser Health News: Money For Health Law Navigators Slashed — Except Where It's Not

Despite all the efforts in Congress to repeal the health law this summer and fall, the Affordable Care Act is still the law of the land. People can start signing up for health insurance for 2018 starting Nov. 1. But the landscape for that law has changed a lot. Take navigators. Those are specially trained people who help consumers sign up for coverage. The federal government cut navigator funding by 41 percent. But that's not an across-the-board cut. Some groups and states are dealing with far deeper cuts, while others will have dollars close to what they had last year. (Olgin, 10/30)

In open enrollment news from the states —

The Oregonian: Insurance Guide 2018: Oregonians Face Fewer Choices, Higher Premiums

Open enrollment begins Nov. 1, the annual period when individual health insurance buyers can switch plans. Many will want to consider their options carefully -- and swiftly -- experts say. Instead of having until Jan. 31 to decide, consumers this year have six weeks ending Dec. 15, and actually less time than that. The online federal insurance exchange, where most Oregonians buy plans and receive financial help, will be shut down for 12 hours on five of those six Sundays. (Hunsberger, 10/29)

Detroit Free Press: Obamacare Enrollment Goes Live In Michigan Nov. 1 With 27% Rate Hikes

Yet the most consequential change could be the higher sticker price for health insurance policies: The average price in Michigan of an individual plan will jump a record 26.9% for 2018. That compares to an average 16.7% increase from 2016 to 2017, and 6.5% from 2015 to 2016. Roughly 300,000 Michiganders are expected to get enrolled in a plan during open enrollment, down from previous years and about 3% of the total population. (Reindl, 10/27)

The CT Mirror: CT Businesses, Employees Face Hikes In Health Care Premiums
When the Affordable Care Act open enrollment period for health insurance begins on Wednesday, many individuals who buy their own policies will suffer sticker shock because of a sharp increase in premiums. But the state's large and small businesses are girding for higher premiums to cover their workers in 2018 too. (Radelat, 10/30)

Boston Globe: If You're Shopping For Health Care, Don't Wait Around
On Nov. 1, the ACA's annual open enrollment period will begin, just like every other year. But this time the Trump administration has made several changes to the program that make things a little different. The administration cut the advertising budget for the program, as well as the budget for "navigators" — people who help guide insurance shoppers through the enrollment process. (Shemkus, 10/27)

Tampa Bay Times: Obamacare Fact Vs. Fiction: What You Need To Know Before Open Enrollment

Consumers are struggling to separate fact from fiction as the open enrollment period approaches for health insurance plans sold on the Affordable Care Act's federal exchange, advocates and insurance companies say. The controversial health care law lives on, even as the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress look for ways to kill it. (Griffin, 10/30)

Miami Herald: Obamacare Open Enrollment In Florida Starts Nov. 1

With the fifth year of open enrollment for Affordable Care Act coverage due to begin Nov. 1, Florida insurers and consumer advocates have six weeks to reach Scherr and others like her who may be more discouraged and confused than ever about the health law commonly known as Obamacare. There are challenges including rising premiums, a shorter window to sign up, and confusion over the status of Obamacare. (Chang, 10/27)

Kaiser Health News: Rural Areas — Already Short On Health Resources — Face Enrollment Hitches

Ms. Stella's, a home-cooking restaurant in Milledgeville, Ga., serves roast beef, grilled pork chops, chicken wings and oxtails with 24 sides from which to choose. Last spring, owners Jeri and Lucious Trawick opened a second restaurant in Eatonton, about 20 miles away, and Jeri decided to leave her full-time job to help shepherd the expansion. But she needed to update the couple's health insurance and went shopping on the Affordable Care Act's online marketplace. Trawick, 43, who considers herself nearly as skilled with a computer as she is with a skillet, found the Obamacare website daunting. (Anderson, 10/27)

Kaiser Health News: Big Gains In Latino Coverage Poised To Slip During Chaotic Enrollment Season

Latinos, who just a year ago were highly sought customers for the Affordable Care Act's marketplace plans may not get the same hard sell this year. The Trump administration's laissez-faire approach toward the upcoming enrollment period for the health law's insurance marketplaces could reverse advances made in the number of Latinos with coverage, fear navigators and community activists. (Andalo, 10/30)

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Cleveland Plain Dealer: Buying Obamacare Coverage? If You Don't Get Subsidies, This Could Cushion You Against Big Hikes

Obamacare math is getting more complicated, but a way to save substantial money in 2018 is now apparent, especially for Ohioans who earn too much money to qualify for subsidies. Buy through an insurance broker or agent, or call the insurer directly. (Koff, 10/27)

7. With New Rule, Administration Wants To Give States More Flexibility On ACA's Essential Benefits

Issued late in the day on Friday, the 365-page plan also proposes other changes to the inner workings of the health insurance markets.

The Associated Press: Trump Administration Proposes Health Law Benefit Changes
The Trump administration on Friday proposed new health insurance regulations that could affect basic benefits required by the Affordable Care Act, but not for a couple of years. Loosening "Obamacare" benefit requirements was a major sticking point for congressional Republicans in thus-far fruitless efforts to repeal the law. The complex new plan from the administration would give states a potential path to easing some requirements. (Alonso-Zaldivar, 10/27)

Modern Healthcare: CMS To Allow States To Define Essential Health Benefits
The CMS proposed a rule late Friday aimed at giving states more flexibility in stabilizing the Affordable Care Act exchanges and in interpreting the law's essential health benefits as a way to lower the cost of individual and small group health plans. ... The CMS said the rule would give states greater flexibility in defining the ACA's minimum essential benefits to increase affordability of coverage. States would play a larger role in the certification of qualified health plans offered on the federal insurance exchange. And they would have more leeway in setting medical loss ratios for individual-market plans. (Meyer, Livingston and Dickson, 10/27)

MEDICAID

8. ACA Supporters, Thwarted By Maine Governor, Seek To Expand Medicaid Through Referendum

Maine Gov. Paul Page (R) has vetoed legislation to implement an expansion five times. Now, health law supporters are taking the issue to voters. In other Medicaid news, Kansas officials will seek federal approval to implement a work requirement, Iowa Democratic lawmakers propose allowing state residents to buy into the Medicaid system and Louisiana's managed care contracts come under scrutiny.

The New York Times: The Governor Blocked Medicaid Expansion. Now Maine Voters Could Overrule Him.

Night after night, in the sharp autumn air, canvassers are knocking on doors across Maine in hopes of getting tens of thousands of poor adults insured through Medicaid. Gov. Paul LePage, a Republican, has five times vetoed expanding access to the program under the Affordable Care Act. Next month, voters here will be the first in the nation to decide the issue by referendum. But even in this liberal city, canvassers have encountered resistance from some as they stood on creaky porches and leaf-strewn

steps to argue, as Lily SanGiovanni did the other night, that "health care is a human right." (Goodnough, 10/27)

Maine Public: Outcome Of Maine's Lengthy Medicaid Expansion Battle Now In Voters' Hands

Maine is one of 19 states that have rejected expansion. But on Nov. 7, it could be the first to approve it at the ballot box. Question 2 asks Maine voters if they want to provide roughly 70,000 Mainers with healthcare coverage by expanding eligibility of Medicaid - known here as MaineCare. ... Meanwhile, Medicaid enrollment has been dropping. The LePage administration has moved aggressively to cut eligibility. And the enrollment numbers show it. In 2012, there were 345,000 Mainers receiving Medicaid. There were 268,000 through June of this year, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. Meanwhile, roughly 70,000 Mainers have fallen into what's known nationally as the ACA coverage gap. The gap occurs in the 19 states that did not expand Medicaid. (Mistler, 10/30)

The Associated Press: Kansas Proposes Work Requirement In New Version Of Medicaid

A proposed change to Kansas' privatized Medicaid program would compel about 12,000 adults to work to obtain benefits, making the state the first in the country to have such a requirement. Gov. Sam Brownback's administration said Friday requiring some Medicaid recipients to work would improve their lives and increase their self-esteem. Advocates for Medicaid recipients said requiring work for Medicaid is illegal. (10/27)

Wichita (Kan.) Eagle: Kansas Proposes Medicaid Work Requirement

Gov. Sam Brownback's administration says the work requirements will improve lives, even as it stresses that only a relatively small number of people who are not currently working will have to find jobs. Of the 12,000 people the administration says will be affected, most are already required to work because they receive welfare assistance. (Shorman, 10/27)

KCUR: Kansas Medicaid Officials Unveil KanCare Renewal Plan To Mixed Reviews

Susan Mosier, secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the state's primary Medicaid agency, said changes proposed in "KanCare 2.0" are aimed at improving the health of approximately 425,000 low-income, disabled or elderly Kansans enrolled in the program and addressing the administrative and service delivery problems that have plagued it since its launch. "As we move to KanCare 2.0, we're really moving from a plan of care to a plan of service," Mosier said. That means shifting beyond a focus on medical care to also addressing the social factors that influence the health of individuals and populations, she said. (McLean, 10/27)

Des Moines Register: Iowans Could Buy Medicaid Coverage Under Democrats' "Public Option"

Two Democratic legislators proposed Friday that Iowa end private management of Medicaid and let consumers who now purchase expensive private insurance buy Medicaid coverage instead. Sen. Matt McCoy and Rep. John Forbes pitched the idea as a way for the state to save hundreds of millions of dollars while offering a lifeline to roughly 20,000 Iowans facing the loss of any affordable options for private health-insurance policies. However, the plan would face long odds in a statehouse controlled by Republicans, and it couldn't go into effect until at least 2019. (Leys, 10/27)

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: Dem Governor Candidates: Let Anyone Buy State BadgerCare Health Plan

As Republicans like Gov. Scott Walker have pushed Congress for the repeal of the federal Affordable Care Act, Democrats in Wisconsin have reacted by seeking a greater health care role for government that's similar to U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders' Medicare for all bill. A growing number of state Democrats, including most of the declared candidates for governor, now back allowing anyone to buy coverage through the state's BadgerCare program. It's part of a national trend. (Stein, 10/27)

The Associated Press: Louisiana Medicaid Contracts Under New Scrutiny
Louisiana's Medicaid managed-care contracts are a high-dollar expense for the state budget that have seen little legislative scrutiny since former Gov. Bobby Jindal privatized much of the Medicaid program five years ago. Now that Gov. John Bel Edwards has inherited the deals, lawmakers are digging more into the spending -- right as the Edwards administration wants to continue the arrangements for another 23 months at a cost of more than \$15 billion in federal and state cash. (10/29)

9. States' Frustrations Growing As Funds Dwindle For Children's Health Coverage

Federal funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) expired last month. Although members of Congress have expressed support for the program, it's not clear if they can bridge differences about how to pay for the program.

The Hill: States Running Out Of Cash For Children's Health Insurance

Uncertainty about the future of an insurance program for children is sparking panic at the state level as officials scramble to keep their coverage going. Federal funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) expired a month ago, and states are dipping into unspent money or asking for help from the Trump administration to

maintain coverage until Congress reaches a deal to extend it. (Hellmann and Roubein, 10/29)

Arizona Republic: KidsCare On The Bubble As Ducey Makes Quiet Bid For More Money

Gov. Doug Ducey was not shy in making clear his position on repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act. But he's been quiet on another federally funded health-care program: the Children's Health Insurance Program, known in Arizona as KidsCare. It provides health coverage to kids whose families make too much to qualify for Medicaid, but not enough to buy insurance on their own. ... Arizona's KidsCare account is running on fumes. Boosted by an extra \$22 million in leftover federal money, the program is still on track to run out of money by late November. That would force the state to kick more than 23,000 kids off the program. (Pitzi, 10/27)

ADMINISTRATION NEWS

10. Watchdogs Concerned About Gift From UnitedHealth To Nominee For An HHS Spot

Stephen Parente has been nominated to be the assistant secretary for planning and evaluation at the Department of Health and Human Services. "The timing doesn't look good," says Scott Amey of the Project on Government Oversight. "I think Mr. Parente should take some steps to assure the public that he's working in the public interest, and not on behalf of United Healthcare or other donors."

Politico: Backed By UnitedHealth, HHS Nominee Would Now Help Oversee It
Five months after President Donald Trump nominated Stephen Parente to be an assistant secretary for Health and Human Services, the nation's largest health insurer quietly gave a \$1.2 million gift to a tiny academic research center that Parente helped found and served as director over the past decade. Parente, who is still awaiting confirmation as HHS' assistant secretary of planning and evaluation, for which he was nominated in April, would head an office that often assesses policies that affect the insurance industry. It is currently researching the impact of Obamacare on the insurance market. (Diamond, 10/30)

In other news from the administration —

USA Today: Speaking The Language Of Science In Administration That Often Eschews It

He joined a Republican administration last month that's often accused of downplaying or disregarding science, but the new surgeon general says he's

"nonpartisan" and will let science and data drive his approach to the opioid epidemic. "It's more important than ever to have that objective voice," physician Jerome Adams said in his first sit-down interview since taking office. "Everyone's got their own opinion (but) make no mistake, the science does matter." (O'Donnell, 10/28)

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The Hill: Planned Parenthood Slams Trump's Rumored Choice Of Women's Issues Ambassador

Planned Parenthood sharply criticized President Trump on Saturday over his rumored nominee to be the next ambassador-at-large for global women's issues at the State Department, saying her appointment would be like "putting an arsonist in charge of the fire department." Politico reported Friday night that Penny Young Nance was being considered for the post. Nance currently serves as the president and CEO of Concerned Women for America, a conservative women's group. (Bowden, 10/28)

PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

11. Privacy Rules Relaxed As Part Of Administration's Attempt To Curb Opioid Epidemic

The rule will allow health care providers to share information with family members, friends and legal representatives if the patient is in crisis. President Donald Trump declared the opioid epidemic a national public health crisis last week, but some are concerned that there's no funding to go along with it.

The Wall Street Journal: Trump Administration Relaxes Medical Privacy Rule For Overdoses

The Trump administration announced Friday it is relaxing a federal privacy rule that prevents health providers from notifying family members about a drug overdose, one of the administration's most significant policy shifts to combat the nation's opioid crisis. The new rule will explicitly permit health-care providers to share information with family members, friends and legal representatives about a patient's medical condition if the patient is in crisis or incapacitated, such as during an opioid overdose. (Hackman, 10/27)

Bloomberg: Trump's Opioid Plan Set To Use Grants His Budget Would Slash
Opioid addictions are hitting America's workforce hard. President Donald Trump's move to declare the crisis a national public health emergency offers some hope for relief: It means Labor Department dislocated-worker grants could be used to help provide jobs for people sidelined by the epidemic. But there's an irony here. The

president has proposed cutting that very grant program by nearly half in fiscal year 2018 -- shrinking the program to \$117 million from \$220.8 million. The spending bill reported out of the House Appropriations Committee would also reduce program funding, by slightly less. Congress has yet to agree on a 2018 spending package, so it remains to be seen whether a cut comes to fruition. (Smialek, 10/27)

Modern Healthcare: Opioid Panel's Report Could Boost Coordination Efforts
President Donald Trump's formal declaration last week that the opioid epidemic is a public health emergency was light on details for the path forward. Nonetheless, the healthcare industry anticipates Trump's special commission will shed more light with its final set of policy recommendations, including ideas for improved coordination between federal agencies. The Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis is slated to release its final report Nov. 1, roughly seven months after the panel was formed to identify effective solutions to the opioid abuse epidemic. (Johnson, 10/28)

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The Hill: Christie: Expect Trump To Ask For 'Billions' To Fight Opioid Epidemic
New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie (R) said in a Sunday interview that he expects President Trump to first ask for "billions" of dollars to fight the opioid epidemic. "I think it's going to be the subject of negotiation with Congress," Christie told ABC's *20/20* This Week. The comment from Christie, who heads Trump's opioid commission, comes after the president on Thursday declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency. (Shelbourne, 10/29)

USA Today: Opioid Victims Say Donald Trump's Declaration Is Good, But Not Enough
Parents of children who overdosed on opioids have waited patiently for President Trump to declare the epidemic a "national emergency," as he twice promised he would. On Thursday, some were disappointed. To some survivors, the declaration instead of a public health emergency is too little, too late. (O'Donnell and DeMio, 10/26)

The Associated Press: Ky. Advocates Ask Trump Official For More Opioid Resources
Advocates and doctors in opioid-ravaged Kentucky urged President Donald Trump's acting chief health official to spend more money on fighting the drug epidemic one day after he signed an order declaring the crisis a national public health emergency. Acting Health and Human Services Secretary Eric Hargan toured a clinic in Lexington, Kentucky, on Friday that specializes in treating pregnant women and their babies addicted to opioid-based drugs like heroin and prescription painkillers. (10/27)

WBUR: State Health Officials Met With Trump Before Opioid Crisis Announcement
Rachel Martin talks to Louisiana State Health Secretary Dr. Rebekah Gee, who was

one of the people who met with the president before he declared a public health emergency. (Martin, 10/27)

The Associated Press: Opioid Epidemic Shares Chilling Similarities With The Past
While declaring the opioid crisis a national public health emergency Thursday, President Donald Trump said: "Nobody has seen anything like what's going on now." He was right, and he was wrong. Yes, this is the most widespread and deadly drug crisis in the nation's history. But there has been a long string of other such epidemics, each sharing chilling similarities with today's unfolding tragedy. (10/28)

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12. College Campuses A Hotbed For Opioid Crisis: 'During Accounting 101, I'm In The Bathroom Snorting Heroin'

Although abuse of painkillers seems to actually be dropping, the number of deaths has been rising. Media outlets report news from Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Ohio and Massachusetts.

The New York Times: Opioids On The Quad

As other college students head out to party on a Saturday night, Julie Linneman, a sophomore at Villanova University, rides the subway to a small rowhouse in West Philadelphia to meet with "her people," a posse of students who understand what it's like to be taken down by opioids. Ms. Linneman is a bespectacled 22-year-old who favors shredded jeans. She is a fan of cooking shows, fantasy fiction and Paul McCartney. She spent her first attempt at sophomore year — the one at Northern Kentucky University — in her dorm room, high on heroin. (Spencer, 10/30)

The Hill: Drug Exec Accused Of Bribing Doctors To Prescribe Opioid Drug

The billionaire founder and top executive of a drug company that manufactures a prescription opioid has been arrested and charged with bribing doctors to overprescribe the drug, CNN reports. John Kapoor, 74, of Insys Therapeutics, was arrested Thursday in Arizona. Authorities say his company had been giving illegal kickbacks to doctors to encourage prescriptions of the powerful painkiller Subsys, which is typically only used for end-stage cancer patients. (Delk, 10/27)

The New York Times: Florida Sheriff Posts Graphic Overdose Video To Combat Opioid Crisis

It's a video that might elicit a lingering sense of dread and, perhaps, déjà vu. A sheriff's deputy approaches a dark blue Nissan with its door ajar in a darkened convenience store parking lot. A man and a woman are passed out in the front seats, their bodies

gaunt and motionless. In the back, a baby girl, 8 months old, is asleep, strapped in a car seat. (Ugwu, 10/26)

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The Washington Post: A Shocking Overdose Photo Exposed Her Addiction — And May Have Saved Her Life

Erika Hurt had become the face of drug addiction. The young mother was captured in a photograph by police, passed out in the driver's seat of her car outside a Dollar General store in Hope, Ind. — an empty syringe still resting between the 25-year-old addict's fingers. The snapshot captured yet another horrifying moment in the worsening U.S. opioid epidemic. What was not seen that Saturday afternoon last October was her 10-month-old son, buckled into his car seat in the back. (Bever, 10/27)

NPR: Baltimore Needs More Funds To Buy Opioid Overdose Drug To Save Lives
As deaths from opioid overdoses rise around the country, the city of Baltimore feels the weight of the epidemic. "I see the impact every single day," says Leana Wen, the city health commissioner. "We have two people in our city dying from overdose every day." As part of Baltimore's strategy to tackle the problem, Wen issued a blanket prescription for the opioid overdose drug naloxone, which often comes in a nasal spray, to all city residents in 2015. (Aubrey, 10/27)

The Washington Post: Even This Puppy Wasn't Safe From America's Opioid Crisis
Like most puppies, Zoey is energetic and insatiably curious. When she's outside, the 3-month-old yellow Labrador keeps her nose pointed to the ground, sniffing things, tackling flowers and chewing on random objects without hesitation. Such was the case on a recent morning, when owner Peter Thibault took Zoey out for a walk on their wooded neighborhood street in Andover, Mass. At some point, he noticed Zoey had lunged toward an empty cigarette box that had been discarded near a tree — and then put it in her mouth. He bent down to try to take the package away from her. (Wang, 10/28)

Arizona Republic: Over 400 Opioid-Overdose Deaths Reported Across Arizona Since June

More than 3,200 suspected opioid overdoses have been reported to state officials since June 15, with more than 400 of those deaths, the Arizona Department of Health Services said. The updated data, released in an Oct. 17 blog post by ADHS Director Cara Christ, highlights a growing problem in Arizona and nationally. (McCrory, 10/27)

The Star Tribune: In Opioid Epidemic, Children Are Becoming The Unseen Victims
The number of overdose deaths involving opioids has quadrupled since 1999, federal

health data show. Last year in Minnesota, the number of drug overdose deaths was nearly six times higher than it was in 2000. As a result, many children have been orphaned, sent to live in foster homes or with relatives. (Shah, 10/29)

Cincinnati Enquirer: Heroin-Addicted Cry Out For Treatment Now, But Help Can Be Slow

Addiction doctors say that the Cincinnati region does not have enough treatment facilities for everyone who needs the help. Many who want treatment do not know how to get what is available, and many who are addicted do not have the means, including transportation or a phone, to find treatment. (DeMio, 10/29)

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Cleveland Plain Dealer: Cuyahoga County Files Lawsuit Accusing Drug Companies Of Racketeering, Leading To Opioid Epidemic

Cuyahoga County officials on Friday filed a lawsuit accusing several major prescription drug companies of intentionally misleading the public about the dangers of opioids to sell more painkillers as they raked in "blockbuster profits." The 269-page complaint, filed in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court, claims drug manufacturers, distributors and four influential doctors unjustly enriched themselves as they acted as a criminal enterprise and conspired to break numerous state laws meant to protect consumers. (Shaffer, 10/27)

13. Beyond Privacy Concerns: Interactive Gadgets Can Pose Threat To Children's Psychology

Children, who are learning what's appropriate social interaction, can be affected more than adults by the human-computer relationship that's becoming more commonplace in homes. In other public health news: early menopause, the shingles vaccine, fatty liver disease, racism, and gun safety.

NPR: Parenting In The Age Of Alexa, Are Artificial Intelligence Devices Safe For Kids? Earlier this month, the toy-giant Mattel announced it had pulled the plug on plans to sell an interactive gadget for children. The device, called Aristotle, looked similar to a baby monitor with a camera. Critics called it creepy. Powered by artificial intelligence, Aristotle could get to know your child — at least that was how the device was being pitched. (Douceff and Aubrey, 10/30)

The New York Times: Underweight Women At Risk Of Early Menopause Underweight women are at increased risk for early menopause, a new study has found. This study, in Human Reproduction, followed 78,759 premenopausal women ages 25

to 42 beginning in 1989. Over the following 22 years, 2,804 of them reported natural menopause before age 45. (Bakalar, 10/26)

The Washington Post: Who Should Get The Shingrix Shingles Vaccine

Barbara Campbell has twice had shingles. Each time, one side of her body was covered in "thousands of these horrid blisters." She could only wear the lightest silk blouse. Anything else touching her skin hurt too much. "I'm in terror of having it happen again," said Campbell, 79, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., describing the painful rash that will affect almost 1 out of 3 people in their lifetime. Because of allergies, she couldn't get the Zostavax vaccine, which is made with live, albeit weakened virus. (Sun, 10/28)

The Washington Post: Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease Is Fast-Growing Reason For Liver Failure--And Transplants--In Young People.

Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease and its more aggressive form, nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, have become the fastest-growing reasons for liver transplants in young Americans, according to a recent study. Typically, older adults experience the slow progression of fatty liver disease that is not related to alcohol but can lead ultimately to liver cirrhosis. As a result of increasing childhood obesity, hypertension and diabetes, however, more young adults are reaching end-stage liver disease early in life, researchers say. (Crist, 10/29)

WBUR: Racism Is Literally Bad For Your Health

A new survey conducted by NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health asked members of different ethnic and racial groups about their experiences with discrimination. Ninety-two percent of African-American respondents said they felt discrimination against African-Americans exists in the United States today, and at least half said they have experienced it themselves at work or when interacting with police. (Martin, 10/28)

Columbus Dispatch: Here's Why Your Kid's Doctors Might Ask You If You Own A Gun Like Fuller, physicians across the country are viewing firearms violence as a public-health threat and asking patients about guns as they would any other safety issue, said Dr. Michael Munger, president of the American Academy of Family Physicians. These conversations aren't new, but Munger said the topic is being brought to the forefront by mass shootings. (Viviano, 10/29)

PHARMACEUTICALS

14. Times Are A Changing: Amazon's Plans, CVS-Aetna Talks Reveal A Shift In PBM Landscape

"You are hearing the warning for the end of the road for the classic standalone" pharmacy-benefit business, said one expert. It was reported last week that CVS is in talks to buy Aetna to diversify its portfolio ahead of Amazon entering the pharmacy marketplace.

Bloomberg: CVS-Aetna Deal Could Mean End Of Era In How Drugs Are Paid For
If Aetna Inc. is eventually swallowed by CVS Health Corp., an important part of the health-care business will be changed -- perhaps for good. For years, pharmacy benefits were largely carved out from the rest of a medical coverage plan. But increasingly the two services are being combined, a move that in theory will make it easier to verify whether expensive drugs are worth the cost. A merger of the third-biggest health insurer with the largest U.S. drugstore chain, which also operates a pharmacy-benefit management company, could speed the process. (Langreth and McLaughlin, 10/27)

Los Angeles Times: CVS-Aetna? Expect More Strange Bedfellows As Competition From Amazon Grows

If CVS Health's reported \$66-billion bid to acquire health insurer Aetna is approved, it could give the retail pharmacy chain an infusion of customers through Aetna's members and more leverage when it negotiates drug prices. But beyond that, the tie-up could help prepare the two companies for what analysts believe will be the industry-rattling arrival of Amazon into the pharmacy business. (Pierson, 10/27)

Boston Globe: CVS Plots A Blockbuster Deal As Amazon Looms Over Pharmacy Business

CVS Health is reportedly in talks to buy health insurer Aetna Inc., an attempt by the Woonsocket, R.I., drugstore giant to insulate itself from tectonic shifts in the health care market. The acquisition would be the latest in CVS's efforts to expand the scope of its health care services amid the uncertainties created by Republican efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and rising medical costs that have consumers, businesses, and politicians on edge. (Nanos, 10/27)

WOMEN'S HEALTH

15. Scientists Develop Further Understanding Of Connection Between Fevers, Birth Defects

The connection between the two is well-known, but scientists weren't sure if it was the fever itself or an infection causing the damage. The Washington Post offers a series looking at maternal health.

The Washington Post: Study Shows How High Fever In Early Pregnancy May Cause Birth Defects

Certain birth defects of the face and heart can occur when babies' mothers have a fever during the first trimester of pregnancy, a crucial time in an embryo's development. Now scientists have figured out the molecular players that make it so. In an experiment with chicken embryos, a temporary rise in incubation temperature — meant to mimic feverlike conditions — was enough to produce defects to the face and heart. Such an elevation in temperature, called hyperthermia, affects the activity of heat-sensitive channels in cells necessary for an embryo's development, researchers report online in the journal *Science Signaling*. (Cunningham, 10/28)

The Washington Post: She Signed Up To Be A Surrogate Mother — And Unwittingly Gave Her Own Child Away

Jessica Allen was already the mother of two boys when she decided to become a surrogate. The pay she would receive to carry another woman's child to term — \$30,000 — would allow Allen to become a stay-at-home mom, as well as save for a new house. It would also be her "chance to give a family the blessing of a child," her partner, Wardell Jasper, told her, according to the *New York Post*, which first reported the story. (Wang, 10/28)

The Washington Post: High Blood Pressure In Pregnancy -- Preeclampsia -- Can Be Dangerous

It has been nearly seven years since Sarah Hughes had preeclampsia, but she still remembers the anguish of missing her newborn's first three days of life when this pregnancy complication sent her back to the hospital with dangerously high blood pressure. Hughes said she could tolerate the gasping for breath and intense headache as well as the painful, intravenous magnesium sulfate she received to reduce the chances of a seizure, but she could not stand being away from her new child, who was at home being cared for by relatives. (Neumann, 10/28)

The Washington Post: Preterm Birth Rate Increases, But Many Women Can't Get Treatment To Prevent It.

There are two medications that prevent preterm birth, the most common cause of perinatal death in the United States. One costs 16 cents a week, one \$285 a week. Poor black women aren't getting either. Why? In 2015, for the first time in eight years, the rate of preterm birth in the United States rose, despite increased understanding of preventive measures. Preterm births cost Americans an estimated \$26 billion per year. (Abbott, 10/29)

In other news —

Los Angeles Times: Argentina Bans Abortion In Most Cases. So Why Is Its Abortion Rate Far Higher Than That Of The U.S.?

The woman stumbled into a public hospital late one night, her stomach turning as she approached the lobby. She was bleeding. Dr. Damian Levy ushered her into a room. Like many of his patients at Hospital Alvarez in Buenos Aires, she was young and poor. At first, she refused to tell him why she was there. Then she burst into a tearful confession. She had tried to perform her own abortion at home and used 40 tablets of the drug misoprostol — nearly three times the suggested dosage for inducing a miscarriage. She was worried that the hospital would report her to police. (Parvini, 10/29)

The Washington Post: Closure Of Two D.C. Maternity Wards Hurts Low-Income Women Most

In the days and weeks before Providence Hospital closed its maternity ward, Caitlin Givens, a midwife, explained to pregnant patients what they needed to do to continue their prenatal care. She talked to them about scheduling appointments with a different provider, how many visits they would need before their delivery. She reminded them they needed their blood pressure checked regularly. (Itkowitz, 10/28)

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STATE WATCH

16. Judge Sides With Nursing Homes Over Fla.'s New Rule Requiring Facilities Have Generators

The rule came in response to the tragedies following Hurricane Irma in which nursing home residents died because of heat, but the administrative judge said there was no pressing danger that justifies the order.

The Associated Press: Florida Governor Loses In Court Battle Over Nursing Homes
Florida Gov. Rick Scott's push to force nursing homes to add generators in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma could be blocked after a judge ruled there was no pressing danger that justifies the order. Scott called for the rules after residents at the Rehabilitation Center at Hollywood Hills died in the days after Irma wiped out power to much of South Florida. (Fineout, 10/27)

The Wall Street Journal: Florida Judge Rules Against Emergency Nursing-Home Generator Measures

The new rules were issued in September, days after the death of eight patients from a

Broward County nursing home that lost central air conditioning when Hurricane Irma hammered the state. Under direction from Gov. Rick Scott, two state agencies demanded nursing homes and assisted-living facilities quickly add generators and fuel to maintain safe temperatures for at least four days during a power outage. The industry balked, with three groups representing elder-care facilities mounting legal challenges focused in part on what they argued was an impossible schedule. (Kamp, 10/27)

Meanwhile, outlets report on nursing home news out of Texas and D.C. —

The Associated Press: Nursing Homes Struggled With Choice To Evacuate In Hurricane

Murky water started seeping into a Port Arthur, Texas, nursing home four days after administrators decided to shelter in place. Volunteers — one even brandishing a gun — demanded relocation of the elderly residents, at least two of whom died in the days after police ultimately ordered the evacuation. The deaths of elderly residents at Lake Arthur Place and other Texas and Florida facilities after hurricanes made landfall in August and September have heightened scrutiny of the evacuation procedures at nursing homes and assisted living facilities. (Lauer and Spencer, 10/29)

The Washington Post: A Death At United Medical Center, The District's Only Public Hospital, Prompts New Questions About Patient Safety At The Troubled Facility
The cries began shortly before 5 a.m., echoing down the almost empty corridors of United Medical Center's nursing home. From his bed in Room 704, Warren Webb's moans cohered into words: "Help! I can't breathe!" A registered nurse appeared and adjusted the height of his bed. But the nurse quickly began arguing with Webb's wheelchair-bound roommate, who was pleading for her to do more to help. Webb rolled out of bed and landed on the floor, his diaper coming loose. (Jamison, 10/29)

17. State Highlights: Decades-Old Law Makes It Really Cheap To Go To Med School In Texas; Wis. Gubernatorial Candidates Embrace Medicare-For-All Type Plan

Media outlets report on news from Texas, Wisconsin, Arkansas, California, Massachusetts, Maryland, Colorado and Illinois.

Stat: Med School On The Cheap: Why Becoming A Doctor In Texas Is A Bargain
When Caitlin Comfort decided to go to medical school, the Yale grad had her heart set on staying on the East Coast. But her wallet had different ideas. Facing \$90,000 per year price tags for tuition, she said no thanks, and started applying to schools back

home in Texas. That's exactly what state legislators and educators want. In Texas, a decades-old law caps tuition at public medical colleges in a bid to bridge a doctor shortage by a) getting students like Comfort to come back, or, b) getting students like her partner, Justin Cardenas, to stay in Texas to get their degree. Right now, tuition is about \$6,550 per year for in-state students. (Satyanarayana, 10/30)

The Associated Press: Arkansas Poised To Execute Man Amid Fight Over Mental Health

Jack Greene's lawyers say he's severely mentally ill. The Arkansas death row inmate says they're lying. As Greene approaches a Nov. 9 execution date, his lawyers are raising questions about who should determine his mental competency. Arkansas gives considerable weight to its prison director's opinion in deciding whether a condemned inmate has the mental capacity to understand his execution; Greene's lawyers want doctors to have a greater say. (Kissel, 10/29)

Los Angeles Times: L.A. County Death Toll From West Nile Virus Climbs To 17
Amid a heat wave that could make West Nile virus more likely to spread, the number of people infected with the disease in Los Angeles County continued to climb this week. At least 230 people in L.A. County have fallen sick with West Nile this year, and 17 of them have died, health officials said Friday. The number of people infected is already the third-highest ever in the county, according to health officials — and the season has yet to end. (Karlamañla, 10/27)

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Dallas Morning News: Last Of 7 Sentenced In Record \$373 Million Health Care Fraud Scheme

A Dallas woman on Thursday was the last of seven people sentenced in a large-scale health care fraud scheme. Cynthia Stiger, 52, was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison and ordered to pay \$23.6 million in restitution to Medicare and Medicaid. Stiger was convicted in April 2016 of one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud. She was one of several people involved in the record \$373 million home health care fraud scheme orchestrated by Dr. Jacques Roy, a former Rockwall physician. (Martin, 10/28)

WBUR: How Mass. Providers Are Responding To A Call For 'Sanctuary Hospitals'
For immigrants in the country illegally, the fear of running into U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents has made some public places appear threatening. In the current environment, that can include a visit to the emergency room. (Dooling, 10/30)

Dallas Morning News: Tenet Healthcare To Cut 1,300 Jobs, Predicts Big Third-Quarter Loss

Tenet Healthcare will cut about 1,300 jobs as part of an initiative to save \$150 million on annual operating expenses. The Dallas-based hospital operator also expects to report a net loss from continuing operations of approximately \$366 million in third quarter. Tenet announced its preliminary financial results for the three months ending Sept. 30 early Friday. The current executive chairman and CEO, Ronald Rittenmeyer, said the changes will help to "drive organic growth, expand margins, and better support our hospitals and other facilities in delivering higher levels of quality and patient satisfaction." (Rice, 10/28)

Houston Chronicle: Breach Of Texas Children's Health Plan Patient Info Feared
More than 900 Texas Children's Health Plan members' personal and medical information may have been compromised in a security breach late last year. Affected members of the insurance plan, which consists of Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program patients, were notified by mail on Friday. Last month, a review of the insurance plan revealed that a former employee had emailed batches of member information from her office to a personal email account in November and December against company policy. (Deam, 10/27)

The Baltimore Sun: More Maryland Children Than Ever Getting Tested For Lead Poisoning

The state is starting to see gains from the requirement beginning last year that all children be tested for lead poisoning at the ages of one and two. The Maryland Department of the Environment reported last week that the number of 1- and 2-year-olds tested for lead in 2016 was 12.2 percent higher than the average for the previous six years. The largest increases were in Howard, Frederick and Carroll counties, where testing rates increased by more than half. (McDaniels, 10/27)

Denver Post: ACC Parker Expands Pre-Medical Classes For Rural Students In Douglas County

Pre-nursing students enrolled at Arapahoe Community College who live in rural towns like Elizabeth and Franktown no longer have to commute to Littleton to knock out their prerequisite science classes. The community college's Parker campus at 15653 Brookstone Drive recently added two science laboratories for microbiology and physiology — two course areas required in a medical track progression. The additions were part of a more than \$1 million renovation of the extension campus that wrapped up this year. (Mitchell, 10/27)

WBUR: Local Medics Train Chicago Residents To Help Shooting Victims

The Chicago group UMedics trains people how to handle medical emergencies,

including gunshot wounds. One trainee is a gunshot victim who credits the program with saving his life. (Hefferman, 10/27)

Chicago Tribune: Chiropractor Found Guilty In \$10 Million Insurance Scam

A Chicago-area chiropractor was found guilty on 18 counts of health care fraud in connection with about \$10 million in false insurance claims made over nearly a decade, according to an indictment released by the FBI. Enrique "Henry" Posada, 55, owner of Associated Back Care and Rehabilitation at 4354 W. 63rd St. in West Lawn, and who was a licensed chiropractor from 1996 until July of this year, was found guilty at the conclusion of a jury trial Friday. The charges, initially announced in March by Joel R. Levin, acting U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, were that Posada presented false inventories to insurance companies — including, but not limited to Medicare — for services that never were provided, the indictment states. (Rosenberg-Douglas, 10/28)

EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS

18. Different Takes: Did Trump's Response To The Opioid Crisis Fall Short? Would A Better Policy Save Lives?

Opinion writers continue to contemplate the impact of President Donald Trump's declaration that the opioid crisis is a public health emergency.

The Washington Post: Trump's Opioid Plan Is Not Enough

Given the scale of the opioid epidemic, the nation should be mobilizing. More people are dying than at the peak of the HIV/AIDS scourge. In some places, overdose deaths are exceeding homicides, suicides and traffic deaths combined. President Trump offered useful actions and ideas at a White House ceremony Thursday, such as measures to prevent addiction with "really great advertising," create nonaddictive painkillers and bolster law enforcement against illegal imports of the synthetic opioid fentanyl. But Mr. Trump's announcements, including the designation of a public-health emergency, are not enough. (10/28)

Los Angeles Times: Thousands Are Dying. The President Needs To Do More Than Bluster On The Opioid Crisis

President Trump's long-anticipated announcement addressing the epidemic of opioid addiction was — ah, how to put this diplomatically — more talk than walk. It was good to hear Trump frame the problem as a public health emergency, not a criminal justice one — a departure from the bad old "war on drugs" 30 days. But there just wasn't much

to his announcement other than vague commitments, troubling insinuations and missed opportunities. (10/28)

Chicago Tribune: Trump's Weak Response To The Opioid Overdose Epidemic
You'd think it would be impossible to kill 100 people a day, every day, without inducing widespread shock and deafening demands for action. But that's what opioids have been doing for the past decade, and Americans have given it only passing attention. This year, the toll is expected to rise to 175 a day ~~3~~ 0 64,000 in all. (Steve Chapman, 10/27)

St. Louis Post-Dispatch: Trump's Response To Opioid Epidemic Is More Pep Talk Than Plan

President Donald Trump promised to come out swinging with Thursday's emergency declaration on opioid abuse. Swing, he did, but he failed to make contact. By labeling the crisis a public health emergency, Trump skirted a legal definition that would have prompted emergency federal funding and placed the drug epidemic on a scale similar to major disaster response. He should have pledged a dollar amount equal to the challenge of combating an addiction epidemic that, by his own assessment, contributed to at least 64,000 U.S. overdose deaths last year. (10/28)

The Des Moines Register: Opioids Are A Tragedy But Not An Emergency

President Donald Trump on Thursday declared the opioid crisis a nationwide public health emergency. Like many Trump proposals, the details are unclear. Administration officials have noted that the declaration, which lasts for 90 days and can be renewed, comes with no dedicated dollars. But they said it will allow them to use existing money to better fight the crisis. Officials also said they would urge Congress, during end-of-the year budget negotiations, to add new cash to a public health emergency fund that Congress hasn't replenished for years. (Joel Kurtinitis, 10/27)

WBUR: I Don't See How Better Opioid Policy Could Have Saved My Brother's Life
Last October, fentanyl killed my brother Mike at age 47. As the CDC reported this summer, Mike was one of 20,100 Americans to die from the drug last year. We now recognize addiction as a disease — and a major national health crisis. (Joseph Walsh, 10/27)

19. Policy Thoughts: A GOP Idea On Reducing Medicare Costs; Health Care In A Wealthy Nation

Editorial pages explore a range of policy ideas, including Medicare costs, the impact of President Donald Trump's budget on safety net programs and the expense of health care in the United States.

The New York Times: How A Republican Idea For Reducing Medicare Costs Could Affect You

Last month, as Republican leaders were preoccupied with another unsuccessful attempt to replace Obamacare, a senior Trump administration official issued a warning about a different major medical program, Medicare. The official, Seema Verma, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, wrote in The Wall Street Journal that Medicare was facing a fiscal crisis. She announced that she was asking the agency's innovation center for ideas to address it, and that part of the answer was to give consumers "incentives to be cost-conscious." D This has some Democrats worried that she's trying to move Medicare toward something called premium support, which would be a huge change for consumers. (Austin Frakt, 10/30)

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel: High Drug Costs Undercut U.S. Healthcare System
One of the major problems facing our country is the high cost of Medicare and Medicaid — and healthcare in general. The hope of everyone is to live a long healthy life, but why should it cost two to three times as much in our country than in any other wealthy nation? (Sheldon B. Lubar and Timothy L. Smunt, 10/27)

The Des Moines Register: Stop Blaming Obamacare And Focus On Helping Iowa
Former Gov. Terry Branstad was an avid Donald Trump supporter leading up to the 2016 presidential election. Gov. Kim Reynolds was glued to his side with an approving smile. Voters in this state ultimately helped send Trump to the White House. What did this political support earn Iowans? Nothing, when it came to helping Iowa shore up its individual health insurance market. Perhaps worse than nothing. (10/27)

Concord (N.H.) Monitor: Trump Budget Attacks Medicaid, Breaks Promises
On Thursday President Donald Trump declared war on the opiate crisis. That same day congressional Republicans effectively raised the white flag in that war by advancing Trump's budget. To quote the Wizard of Oz, "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain." The budget would decimate funding for Medicaid. According to nonpartisan analysis, cuts are more than \$1 trillion for Medicaid over a decade's time and \$473 billion for Medicare. They're almost certainly worse, as additional "savings" from safety net programs is undefined. (Brendan Williams, 10/30)

20. Viewpoints: Parsing Ohio's Drug-Pricing Ballot Issue; Link Between Birth Control And The Economy

A selection of opinions on health care from around the country.

Cleveland Plain Dealer: Vote No On Issue 2, Ohio Drug-Pricing Proposal

There's no doubt that both sides on the Issue 2 drug-pricing ballot issue in Ohio hope voter doubts created by their conflicting claims and accusations will bring them victory. But let's cut through the clutter: As much as Issue 2 might feel good, it's unworkable. (10/28)

Cleveland Plain Dealer: History Shows Why Ohio Issue 2 Won't Lower Drug Prices
Before Ohioans vote on Issue 2, the ballot initiative that would create price controls in Ohio for prescription drugs, a quick backward glance through history is instructive. Richard Nixon imposed a price and wage freeze in August 1971. A political win in the short run, Nixon's scheme was ultimately a colossal failure, ushering in some of the worst inflation in 20th-century American history. (Grover Norquist, 10/29)

Cleveland Plain Dealer: Weighing Ohio Issue 2, Where A Symbolic "Yes" Against Drug-Pricing Greed Might Feel Really Good, But Is It The Right Choice?

Few in Ohio are unaware of Issue 2, thanks to the avalanche of ads. From listening, you could be either scared of rising drug prices or fighting mad at the greedy drug companies. But most are just confused and totally uncertain as to how to vote! And the real underlying questions are not addressed at all. (J.B. Silvers, 10/29)

The New York Times: The Economy Can't Grow Without Birth Control

This month, 41 Democrats introduced a bill with a simple mission: It would undo the Trump administration's recent change to the Affordable Care Act that paves the way for virtually any employer to deny its employees access to contraception without a co-payment. Before President Trump's new guidance, the law required nearly all employers to offer workers health insurance plans that include contraception without cost. But the new rules, effective immediately after the announcement, allow any employer to request that the government let it opt out based on religious or moral objections. (Bryce Covert, 10/29)

Bloomberg: These Hospital Bonds Are On Life Support

Junk-bond buyers appear to have a blind spot when it comes to for-profit health care companies. They've snapped up bonds of Tenet Healthcare Corp. and Community Health Systems Inc. despite the drastically souring outlook for both hospital operators. Some of this may be idiosyncratic or the result of specific investors' strategies (or unwillingness to sell). Franklin Resources Inc., for example, now owns nearly 20 percent of Community Health's total debt and more than half of its \$1.9 billion of bonds

maturing in 2019, according to recent filings compiled by Bloomberg. (Lisa Abramowicz and Max Nisen, 10/27)

Louisville Courier-Journal: University Of Louisville Hospital Making Strides To Improve Health Care

During recent years, the reported quality scores for [University of Louisville] Hospital and the James Graham Brown Cancer Center have not been where we want them. Now we own our results and we are changing. One of the most visible actions we have taken is the hiring of over 100 registered nurses in our first 60 days of operations. This brings more caregivers directly to the bedside to ensure our patients receive the best care possible. Additionally, we have made significant strides on other indicators such as a decrease in our mortality index and a reduction in the average length of stay. (Ken Marshall, 10/29)

Chicago Tribune: To The Soda Tax Meddlers In Springfield: Thanks But No Thanks
Cook County's short-lived penny-an-ounce sweetened beverage tax was a very bad idea. Just ask County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. Here's an even worse idea: The Illinois General Assembly's flirtation with a bill that would prohibit counties throughout the state from enacting such a tax. (10/27)

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First Edition

Wednesday, December 20, 2017

Visit Kaiser Health News for the latest headlines

Today's early morning highlights from the major news organizations.

Kaiser Health News: Doing More Harm Than Good? Epidemic Of Screening Burdens Nation's Older Patients

Elena Altemus is 89 and has dementia. She often forgets her children's names, and sometimes can't recall whether she lives in Maryland or Italy. Yet Elena, who entered a nursing home in November, was screened for breast cancer as recently as this summer. "If the screening is not too invasive, why not?" asked her daughter, Dorothy Altemus. "I want her to have the best quality of life possible." (Szabo, 12/20)

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California Healthline: Frail Patients Losing Access To Dental House Calls

Devon Rising shakes his head and tries to cover his face with his hands. It's time to get his few remaining teeth cleaned, and he fusses for a bit. Gita Aminloo, his dental hygienist, tries to calm him by singing "Itsy Bitsy Spider," the classic children's song. Rising, 42, is mentally disabled and blind. He has cerebral palsy and suffers from seizures. It's hard for him to get to a dentist's office, so Aminloo brought her dental picks, brushes and other tools to him at the residential care facility he shares with several other people who have developmental disabilities. (Ibarra, 12/19)

The New York Times: Congress Approves Republican Tax Plan Setting Up Delivery To Trump's Desk

Clearing the final major hurdle for a decades-long goal, Republicans mustered enough support in the Senate to approve a sweeping tax plan. The vote, along party lines, was 51-48. Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, was the only one who was not present, as he returned home to receive medical treatment. (12/20)

The Washington Post: GOP Tax Bill's Passage Slightly Delayed Over Last-Minute Senate Snag

House Republicans thought they had finished their tax work on Tuesday afternoon when they passed a version of the bill 227 to 203. But the effort hit a snag Tuesday afternoon when the Senate parliamentarian ruled that three of its provisions violated that chamber's Byrd Rule — guidelines on what types of legislation can pass with a simple 50-vote majority. (Stein and Paletta, 12/20)

The Associated Press: Senate Moves Tax Cut Legislation To Brink Of Final Passage

The legislation repeals an important part of the 2010 health care law — the requirement that all Americans carry health insurance or face a penalty — as the GOP looks to unravel the law it failed to repeal and replace this past summer. (12/20)

Bloomberg: Cornyn Says Tax Bill Mandate Repeal Makes Obamacare 'Unworkable'

The No. 2 Senate Republican said Tuesday that the GOP's tax bill will make Obamacare "unworkable," which he hopes will force Democrats into negotiations to replace the law. Asked about the failure of the GOP's efforts to overhaul the Affordable Care Act, Senator John Cornyn of Texas noted the tax measure will repeal the penalty for not buying health insurance, a central element of the Affordable Care Act. (Dennis, 12/19)

The Wall Street Journal: How The Tax Plan Affects Business: Everything You Need To Know

Health insurers, an overwhelmingly domestic industry, will reap enormous benefits from the tax bill's sharp cut to the corporate rate. Analysts project that the companies initially could see sharp increases in earnings—perhaps in the 15% to 20% range, said Ana Gupte of Leerink Partners LLC. "It's huge," she said. She suggested that insurers are likely to find a variety of outlets for the additional cash, including share repurchases, dividends, investing to grow their businesses and merger activity, which would come on top of a fast pace of managed-care deals already under way. (Wilde Mathews, 12/19)

The Associated Press: Tax Bill: What's In, What's Out, What Happens

So what's in the massive \$1.5 trillion Republican tax package, what's not and what does it mean for most Americans? (12/20)

Politico: The Stealth Repeal Of Obamacare

Obamacare survived the first year of President Donald Trump, but it's badly damaged. The sweeping Republican tax bill on the verge of final passage would repeal the individual mandate in 2019, potentially taking millions of people out of the health insurance market. On top of that, the Trump administration has killed some subsidies, halved the insurance enrollment period, gutted the Obamacare marketing campaign, and rolled out a regulatory red carpet for skimpy new health plans that will change the insurance landscape in ways that are harmful to former President Barack Obama's signature health care law. (Kenen, 12/19)

Politico: Ryan And McConnell Head For Clash Over Obamacare

Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell are about to lock horns over Obamacare — part of a House-Senate clash that needs to be resolved by Friday to avert a government shutdown. McConnell promised moderate GOP Sen. Susan Collins of Maine that he would prop up President Barack Obama's signature health law in a must-pass, year-end spending bill — so long as she backs tax reform. But Ryan's more conservative conference is flatly rejecting that idea and urging the Wisconsin Republican to stand firm against his Senate counterpart. (Bade and Haberkorn, 12/19)

Politico: Collins Decries Coverage Of Her Tax Bill Support As 'unbelievably Sexist'

Sen. Susan Collins on Tuesday blasted coverage of her support for the GOP tax bill as "extremely discouraging" and "unbelievably sexist." The Maine Republican, a key swing vote on the tax package, accused reporters of ignoring her influence over the final legislation and unfairly criticizing her efforts to pass a pair of Obamacare stabilization bills. (Cancryn, 12/19)

The Hill: Abortion Fight Threatens Collins Deal, Risks Shutdown

A new fight over abortion has thrown a late obstacle into negotiations on the year-end stopgap spending deal days before a possible government shutdown. House Republicans say two ObamaCare measures that Senate GOP leaders are expected to attach to the stopgap as part of a deal with Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) must include Hyde Amendment language prohibiting the use of federal funds for abortion. (Hellmann and Sullivan, 12/19)

The Hill: Anti-Abortion Groups Press For Change To ObamaCare Bills

More than 50 anti-abortion groups are calling on Congress to amend an ObamaCare stabilization bill to ensure that federal funding doesn't go to plans that cover abortions. Led by the Susan B. Anthony List, the groups are pressuring lawmakers to vote against the bill, sponsored by Sens. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.), that would reimburse insurance companies for giving discounted deductibles and copays to low-income customers. (Hellmann, 12/19)

The Hill: Connecticut To End Children's Health Program Unless It Gets Money From Congress

Connecticut plans to shutter its health-care program for low- and middle-income children Jan. 31 unless Congress provides new federal funding. Congress let the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) lapse on Sept. 30, to the frustration of state officials and advocates. The program provides insurance to nearly 9 million children nationwide. (Roubein, 12/19)

The Hill: Dem Rips Disaster Package For Failing To Address Medicaid In Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands

A top Democratic lawmaker on Tuesday ripped the House's disaster funding package for failing to include any provisions helping Medicaid programs for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. "It's disgraceful that the House Republican's emergency supplemental funding package does absolutely nothing for the more than 1.6 million Americans in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that are counting on Medicaid in the wake of overwhelming devastation," said Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (N.J.), the top Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee. (Weixel, 12/19)

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The Wall Street Journal: Deals Boom In Push To Move Health Care Out Of Hospitals

A recent burst of deal-making among health-care companies is set to accelerate the shift in how and where Americans get medical care—away from hospitals and toward clinics, doctors' offices, surgery centers and even drugstores. Potential mergers disclosed since early December involve companies with more than \$550 billion in cumulative revenue, a sign of how much of the industry is caught up in efforts to reshape the landscape. (Wilde Mathews and Evans, 12/20)

Reuters: Humana, Private Equity Firms Buy Kindred Healthcare For \$810 Million

U.S. health insurer Humana Inc and two private equity firms agreed to buy home healthcare and long-term care operator Kindred Healthcare Inc on Tuesday for about \$810 million, the latest expansion by an American health insurer into patient care.

Humana, TPG Capital and Welsh, Carson, Anderson & Stowe will pay \$9 per share in cash. They said that, with debt and other costs, they are paying about \$4 billion (3 billion pounds) for the company. (Humer, 12/19)

The Wall Street Journal: Tenet Healthcare Explores Sale Of Conifer, Expands Cost-Cutting Program

One of the nation's largest for-profit hospital chains, Tenet Healthcare Corp., is exploring a sale of its health-care operations management business and plans to boost cost-cutting efforts. The moves announced Tuesday come after the company announced 1,300 job cuts in October. (Hufford, 12/19)

The Wall Street Journal: FDA Blesses Blindness Treatment That Could Cost \$1 Million

The Food and Drug Administration approved for sale the first therapy in the U.S. that delivers a functional gene to replace a faulty, disease-causing one—a treatment that could carry a price in excess of \$1 million, its maker has said. The injected gene therapy from Spark Therapeutics Inc. is designed to improve sight in people with a rare form of vision loss caused by an inherited genetic mutation. The condition, retinal dystrophy, often manifests itself in young children and affects up to 3,000 Americans, Spark said. (Loftus, 12/19)

The Washington Post: FDA Approves First Gene Therapy For An Inherited Disease

In a historic move, the Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday approved a pioneering gene therapy for a rare form of childhood blindness, the first such treatment cleared in the United States for an inherited disease. The approval signals a new era for gene therapy, a field that struggled for decades to overcome devastating setbacks but now is pushing forward in an effort to develop treatments for hemophilia, sickle-cell anemia and an array of other genetic diseases. Yet the products, should they reach patients, are likely to carry stratospheric prices — a prospect already worrying consumer advocates and economists. (McGinley, 12/19)

Los Angeles Times: FDA Approves Gene Therapy To Fix Mutations That Can Lead To Blindness

Tuesday's announcement marks the third time in five months that the drug safety agency has allowed a gene therapy — a form of treatment with a long and fitful safety history — on the U.S. market. The first approval went to Kymriah, which treats a form of leukemia, in August. In October, the drug agency cleared a second gene-based treatment called Yescarta to treat a form of lymphoma. "Gene therapy will become a mainstay in treating, and maybe curing, many of our most devastating and intractable

illnesses," Dr. Scott Gottlieb, the FDA's commissioner, said Tuesday. "We're at a turning point when it comes to this novel form of therapy." (Healy, 12/19)

Stat: FDA Approves First Gene Therapy Targeting Rare Form Of Inherited Blindness

Like other gene therapies, Luxturna inserts a functional piece of DNA into cells in order to replace or override a defective, disease-causing gene. For Spark, the injection site is the eyes of people, mostly children and young adults, who have a type of inherited retinal disease caused by a mutation in a gene called RPE65. People born with mutated RPE65 genes suffer from severe vision problems, including night blindness. As the disease progresses, people lose all functional vision and can eventually become totally blind. (Feuerstein, 12/19)

NPR: Luxturna Approved By FDA To Treat Inherited Form Of Blindness

In tests on patients, the treatment often produced dramatic results, restoring the ability of patients to see things they could never see before, such as the stars, the moon, fireworks and their parents' faces. The treatment also enabled patients to do many things that had been impossible, such as read, play sports, ride bicycles and go outside at night by themselves. "Today's approval marks another first in the field of gene therapy," said FDA Commission Scott Gottlieb in a statement announcing the decision. "This milestone reinforces the potential of this breakthrough approach in treating a wide range of challenging diseases." (Stein, 12/19)

Stat: Lawmakers Who Scold Pharma For Price Gouging Get Some New Ammunition

As anger rose over prescription drug prices, two Washington lawmakers criticized drug makers for taking advantage of Americans, but wanted numbers to back up their claims. Now a new government report, which they requested, provide those numbers — and also potential ammunition in the fight over drug prices. From 2006 to 2015, global sales for the pharmaceutical industry, including biotech companies, jumped 45 percent to \$775 billion. Two-thirds of all drug makers experienced rising profit margins, which averaged 17 percent in 2015. And from 2008 through 2014, worldwide R&D spending — most of which went to drug development, rather than research — increased 8.5 percent, to \$89 billion. (Silverman, 12/19)

Stat: Experts Call For Use Of Sanofi's Dengue Vaccine To Be Halted In Most Cases

The use of the world's first dengue vaccine should be temporarily suspended except in limited circumstances because of concerns that it could put some people at heightened risk of severe disease, according to prominent public health experts. That step, they say, is necessary after studies showed that the vaccine, manufactured by Sanofi

Pasteur, can have an unfortunate effect: worsening — rather than preventing — future cases of dengue in some people who had not previously been infected with it. (Branswell, 12/19)

The New York Times: A Federal Ban On Making Lethal Viruses Is Lifted

Federal officials on Tuesday ended a moratorium imposed three years ago on funding research that alters germs to make them more lethal. Such work can now proceed, said Dr. Francis S. Collins, the head of the National Institutes of Health, but only if a scientific panel decides that the benefits justify the risks. (McNeil, 12/19)

The Washington Post: U.S. Lifts Research Moratorium On Enhancing Germs' Danger

The new policy for pathogens capable of creating a pandemic will allow researchers who want to study them to apply for funding through the new process outlined by the Department of Health and Human Services. The end of the moratorium applies to research on the SARS, MERS, influenza and other dangerous viruses. The October 2014 pause was put in place after researchers in Wisconsin and the Netherlands sparked a debate by announcing in 2011 that they had made the deadly H5N1 bird flu virus more contagious in ferrets, which are used as a model for how disease might spread among humans. This kind of research is known as “gain of function” because it introduces new abilities into existing germs. (Bernstein, 12/19)

NPR: NIH Lifts Ban On Research That Could Make Deadly Viruses Even Worse

On Tuesday, the Department of Health and Human Services released a new framework for making decisions about funding research that has the potential to create a new pandemic strain. “We have a responsibility to ensure that research with infectious agents is conducted responsibly, and that we consider the potential biosafety and biosecurity risks associated with such research,” said Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, in a statement. The move by officials may mark the end of a long saga that has sharply divided the scientific community in recent years. (Greenfieldboyce, 12/19)

The New York Times: E.P.A. Delays Bans On Uses Of Hazardous Chemicals

The Environmental Protection Agency will indefinitely postpone bans on certain uses of three toxic chemicals found in consumer products, according to an update of the Trump administration’s regulatory plans. Critics said the reversal demonstrated the agency’s increasing reluctance to use enforcement powers granted to it last year by Congress under the Toxic Substances Control Act. (Kaplan, 12/19)

The Associated Press: Prospects Ebb For High Court Fight Over Immigrant's Abortion

A potential Supreme Court confrontation over the ability of a pregnant immigrant teenager in U.S. custody to have an abortion appears to be receding. The Trump administration says in court papers filed Tuesday that it has obtained the teen's birth certificate and it shows she is 19 years old, not 17. That means she will no longer be in the custody of the Health and Human Services Department office that oversees shelters housing immigrant children. (12/19)

Politico: Supreme Court Abortion Showdown Is Defused

The age difference is significant because Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which is responsible for adults in immigration detention, tends to have fewer restrictions on pregnant women seeking to obtain abortions while in custody. Later Tuesday, the Justice Department said the immigrant was turned over to ICE and released on her own recognizance. That leaves her free to seek an abortion if she wishes to do so. (Gerstein and Rayasam, 12/19)

NPR: Stress From Racism May Be Causing African-American Babies To Die More Often

In February 2009, Samantha Pierce became pregnant with twins. It was a time when things were going really well in her life. She and her husband had recently gotten married. They had good jobs. "I was a kick-ass community organizer," says Pierce, who is African-American and lives in Cleveland. She worked for a nonprofit that fought against predatory lending. The organization was growing, and Pierce had been promoted to management. (Chatterjee and Davis, 12/20)

The Washington Post: A Model's Warning About Tampons And Toxic Shock Syndrome

Lauren Wasser woke up in a hospital bed 80 pounds heavier than she was supposed to be — filled with fluids to try to flush the toxins from her body. She struggled to move, and her feet felt like they were being lit with a lighter again and again. But the model did not know how dire her situation was — until she overheard a nurse discussing the surgery that would upend her life: Wasser, just 24 years old at the time, would need a below-the-knee amputation on her right leg. (Bever, 12/19)

Los Angeles Times: Rich People Experience Happiness In A More Self-Centered Way Than Poor People, Study Suggests

Rich people are different from the rest of us — and that includes the way they experience happiness. Instead of feeling positive emotions that involve connections with other people, their happiness is more likely to be expressed as feelings that focus on themselves, new research shows. However, this difference doesn't necessarily mean

that high-income people have more total happiness than people who earn less. The findings were published this week in the journal *Emotion*, and they seemed to fit a larger pattern, according to the psychologists who conducted the study. (Kaplan, 12/19)

The Washington Post: She Finally Had A Baby Naturally — With A 24-Year-Old Frozen Embryo.

When Tina Gibson got married seven years ago, the 26-year-old knew it was unlikely that she would have children naturally. Her husband, 33-year-old Benjamin Gibson, had cystic fibrosis, a condition that can make men infertile, the couple told CNN. The East Tennessee pair decided they would eventually adopt a child instead — and that they would foster several children in the meantime, until they were ready. (Eltagouri, 12/19)

The New York Times: 'It's My Life': Brain Cancer Motivates City Commissioner's Activism

As commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, Nisha Agarwal would often lobby legislators on behalf of vulnerable New Yorkers. On Monday she was lobbying again — but for herself. Ms. Agarwal, 39, who has been on medical leave from City Hall since August, revealed in an interview Monday that she has a rare form of brain cancer. During surgery to remove the tumor, she said, she had a stroke, which initially left her unable to speak or walk. (Robbins, 12/19)

The Associated Press: Kansas State Mental Hospital Regains Certification For Unit

The state mental hospital in eastern Kansas has regained federal certification for one of its treatment units after two years of working to address safety and patient care issues, a dose of good news as officials consider the entire hospital's future. The Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services confirmed Tuesday that Osawatimie State Hospital, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) southwest of Kansas City, had passed a federal inspection after Thanksgiving, the second within four months. (12/19)

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Friday, December 22, 2017

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KHN's Weekly Edition will return on Jan. 5. Check khn.org for new content during the holiday week.

THE HEALTH LAW

Children's Insurance, Other Health Programs Funded — For Now — In Bill

By Julie Rovner In a short-term spending bill, Congress extends money to the Children's Health Insurance Program through March.

Despite Compressed Sign-Up Period, ACA Enrollment Nearly Matches Last Year's

By Julie Rovner HHS announces that 8.8 million people signed up for coverage through the federal insurance marketplace.

Podcast: 'What The Health?' 2017: The Year In Health Policy

In this episode of "What The Health?" Julie Rovner of Kaiser Health News, Joanne Kenen of Politico, Alice Ollstein of Talking Points Memo and Margot Sanger-Katz of The New York Times discuss this week's news, including health issues in the just-passed tax bill and a look back on the year in health policy.

CAPITOL HILL WATCH

Bonus Tucked Into GOP Tax Bill For Those Aiming To Deduct Medical Expenses

By Michelle Andrews The House sought to eliminate the tax deduction, generally used by people with serious illnesses or those who need long-term care services but it was eventually restored in the final bill — and expanded.

No Sweeteners Added To Tax Bill To Spread Use Of Health Savings Accounts

By Michelle Andrews These accounts are exempt from taxes and linked to high-deductible health plans. Republicans tried last summer in their unsuccessful efforts to replace the health law to make the accounts more enticing for consumers, but they didn't make those changes in the current tax bill.

PHARMACEUTICALS

Arthritis Drugs Show How U.S. Drug Prices Defy Economics

By Julie Appleby Drugs that treat rheumatoid arthritis started out costing about \$10,000 a year. Ten years later, they list for more than \$40,000.

Biosimilars, Biologics And New Legal Challenges For RA Treatments

By Julie Appleby As biosimilar products reach the market and rival more established RA treatments, the players are exploring legal challenges involving antitrust and anti-competitive behavior.

FDA Chief Says He's Open To Rethinking Incentives On Orphan Drugs

By Sarah Jane Tribble The FDA's Scott Gottlieb says the agency is focused on the big picture, and he wants to know why pharma churns out drugs for some rare diseases but not for others.

Drug Industry Spent Millions To Squelch Talk About High Drug Prices

By Jay Hancock Last year, the pharma industry's biggest trade group raised millions to change the conversation about drug pricing.

SAFETY & QUALITY

Medicare Penalizes Group Of 751 Hospitals For Patient Injuries

By Jordan Rau Each hospital will have its payments reduced by 1 percent for the year.

Get The Data Table: See Which Hospitals Were Penalized

Infection Lapses Rampant In Nursing Homes But Punishment Is Rare

By Jordan Rau Photos by Heidi de Marco A Kaiser Health News analysis of federal inspection records shows that nursing home inspectors labeled mistakes in infection control as serious for only 161 of the 12,056 homes they have cited since 2014.

Unregulated Herpes Experiments Expose 'Black Hole' Of Accountability

By Marisa Taylor Controversial research methods by university researcher unlikely to prompt federal response or institutional change, experts say.

AGING

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The Long Goodbye: Coping With Sadness And Grief Before A Loved One Dies

By Judith Graham For those confronting the string of losses that accompany frailty or serious illness, experts offer salves.

Doing More Harm Than Good? Epidemic of Screening Burdens Nation's Older Patients

By Liz Szabo Patients are often aggressively screened for cancer, even if they won't live long enough to benefit.

When Nursing Homes Push Out Poor And Disabled Patients

By Jocelyn Wiener Complaints are rising in California and other states about improper evictions and discharges. Advocates say some patients end up in cheap hotels, homeless or back in the hospital.

MORE KHN COVERAGE

Looking North: Can A Single-Payer Health System Work In The U.S.?

By Shefali Luthra American single-payer advocates want to emulate Canada's system. But many Canadian experts say the U.S. first needs to address some basic questions.

Canada's Single-Payer Health System: What Is True? What Is False?

By Shefali Luthra It's a regular part of the politically charged debate over health care. But the lines sometimes blur between rhetoric and how Canada's system actually works.

Near Incineration Of Psychiatric Hospital Highlights Gaping Need For More Beds

By Barbara Feder Ostrov Fire almost destroyed one of two acute care facilities in

Ventura County — wiping out most of the region's inpatient capacity. In California and nationally, such hospitals are strained by demand — and disasters.

Arizona Declares Opioid Emergency, But Signals Are Mixed Over Best Response

By Will Stone, KJZZ Arizona is one of a few states that have declared the opioid epidemic a public health emergency. There's no uniformity in what that means from state to state, though, and even within Arizona, there's a wide divergence of opinion on how best to tackle the problem.

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First Edition

Friday, January 05, 2018

Visit Kaiser Health News for the latest headlines

Today's early morning highlights from the major news organizations.

Kaiser Health News: Trump Administration Rule Paves Way For Association Health Plans

The Department of Labor on Thursday released proposed new rules that proponents say will make it easier for businesses to band together in "associations" to buy health insurance. These rules, supporters say, will lead to more affordable choices for some small businesses and sole proprietors, likely starting in 2019. Association coverage "should be cheaper and arguably just as comprehensive" as what many employers can now buy, said Christopher Condeluci, a Washington, D.C., attorney who specializes in employee benefits and has served as the tax and benefits counsel to the U.S. Senate Finance Committee. (Appleby, 1/4)

Kaiser Health News: Maine Voters Chose Medicaid Expansion. Why Is Their Governor Resisting?

Donna Wall cares for her three adult autistic children at her home in Lewiston, Maine. It's a full-time job. Sons Christopher and Brandon have frequent outbursts, and the stress of tending to them can be overwhelming. When her twin sons turned 18 a year and a half ago, Maine's Medicaid program dropped her health insurance. Wall is considered a "childless adult" in Maine and other states that didn't expand Medicaid, and so she isn't eligible for coverage. She can no longer get her antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications. She can't see her psychologist or a doctor to check up on a troubling spot on her eye. (Varney, 1/5)

Kaiser Health News: Podcast: 'What The Health?' While You Were Celebrating ...

The year in health policy has already begun: The Trump administration Thursday released a long-awaited regulation aimed at making it easier for small businesses and others to form "association health plans." Now advocates and opponents will be able to weigh in with more specific recommendations. Meanwhile, in December, the health policy focus was on the tax bill and its repeal of the Affordable Care Act's "individual mandate" penalty for most people who don't have health insurance. But some recent key court decisions could reshape the benefits millions of people receive as part of their health coverage. (1/4)

Kaiser Health News: From Retirement To The Front Lines Of Hepatitis C Treatment

When a hepatitis C treatment called Harvoni was released in 2014, Dr. Ronald Cirillo knew it was a big deal. "It's the reason that dragged me out of retirement!" he said. Cirillo specialized in treating hepatitis C for more than 30 years in Stamford, Conn., before retiring to Bradenton, Fla. During his time in Connecticut, the only available treatment for hepatitis C had terrible side effects and didn't work well. It cured the viral infection less than half the time. But the newer drugs, Harvoni and Sovaldi, cure almost everybody, with few adverse reactions. (Ochoa, 1/5)

The New York Times: Trump Proposes New Health Plan Options For Small Businesses

The Trump administration on Thursday proposed sweeping new rules that could make it easier for small businesses to band together and create health insurance plans that would be exempt from many of the consumer protections mandated by the Affordable Care Act. As many as 11 million Americans "could find coverage under this proposal," the Labor Department said in issuing the proposed rules, which carry out an executive order signed by President Trump on Oct. 12. The public will have 60 days to comment on the proposal before the Trump administration adopts final rules with the force of law. (Pear, 1/4)

The Washington Post: Trump Administration Proposes Rules For Health Plans Without Certain ACA Protections

The proposal, issued by the Labor Department, would carry out the most significant part of an executive order that President Trump signed in October, directing the government to foster alternative types of insurance. Proponents say the association health plans would be less expensive and enhance consumer choice, while critics — including the insurance industry — fear they would promote substandard coverage and weaken the ACA's already fragile insurance marketplaces. Specifically, the rules would allow such health plans to be reclassified so they no longer would have to include a set of 10 essential health benefits — including maternity care, prescription drugs and

mental health services — that the ACA requires of insurance sold to individuals and small companies. (Goldstein, 1/4)

The Wall Street Journal: Trump Administration Proposal Would Exempt Small Businesses From Some ACA Rules

[A] senior official said there are nondiscrimination provisions in the rule, a draft of which was released on Thursday, that would prevent an association from cherry-picking employers with healthy workforces or charging higher premiums to less-healthy people. An association couldn't charge different premiums to different small employers based on health factors, the official said. But allowing the plans not to cover the mandatory ACA benefits could enable associations to essentially exclude people by not offering coverage for specific treatments, such as chemotherapy, said Timothy Jost, an emeritus law professor at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va. "There are plenty of opportunities for discrimination," he said. (Armour, 1/4)

Los Angeles Times: Trump's Move To Make Skimpier Health Plans More Available Threatens To Undermine Obamacare

[M]any patient groups and consumer advocates — who are already alarmed by Trump administration efforts to undermine the 2010 health law — fear that less comprehensive health plans will leave Americans without vital protections. "The rule proposed today will almost certainly result in more people facing financial distress when an unexpected health crisis happens and they discover their association health plan coverage is inadequate," said Chris Hansen, president of the advocacy arm of the American Cancer Society. By allowing healthier Americans to buy plans that don't cover expensive medications or other medical benefits, these plans also risk driving up costs for sick patients who need the more extensive coverage. (Levey, 1/4)

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The Associated Press: In New Rule, Trump Tries To Deliver A Health Care Promise

Don't look for revolutionary changes, said analyst Elizabeth Carpenter of the health industry consultancy Avalere Health. "The impact on the markets and on consumers really may depend on whether it is easy enough for the groups potentially affected to take advantage of the rule," she said. No sweeping consequences are seen for the more than 170 million Americans with employer-sponsored coverage, or the nearly 30 million still uninsured. (1/4)

The New York Times: Trump Administration Takes Step That Could Threaten Marijuana Legalization Movement

The viability of the multibillion-dollar marijuana legalization movement was thrown into

new doubt on Thursday when the Trump administration freed prosecutors to more aggressively enforce federal laws against the drug in states that have decriminalized its production and sale, most recently California. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, long a vocal opponent of the legalization of marijuana, rescinded an Obama-era policy that discouraged federal prosecutors in most cases from bringing charges wherever the drug is legal under state laws. (Savage and Healy, 1/4)

The Associated Press: Federal Pot Policy Change Sparks Confusion, Crackdown Fears

Officials wouldn't say if federal prosecutors would target pot shops and legal growers, nor would they speculate on whether pot prosecutions would increase. The action by Attorney General Jeff Sessions was not unexpected given his longtime opposition to pot, but comes at a heady time for the industry as retail pot sales rolled out New Year's Day in California. (1/5)

The Associated Press: Q&A: What Does Sessions' Policy Mean For The Future Of Weed?

A federal law blocks the Justice Department from interfering with medical marijuana programs in states where it is allowed. Justice Department officials said they would follow the law, but would not preclude the possibility of medical-marijuana related prosecutions. (Gurman, 1/4)

The New York Times: California Defiant In Face Of Federal Move To Get Tough On Marijuana

The sale of recreational cannabis became legal in California on New Year's Day. Four days later, the Trump administration acted in effect to undermine that state law by allowing federal prosecutors to be more aggressive in prosecuting marijuana cases. A memo by Attorney General Jeff Sessions on Thursday was widely interpreted in the nation's most populous state as the latest example of Trump vs. California, a multifront battle of issues ranging from immigration to taxes to the environment. (Fuller, 1/4)

The Hill: CDC Schedules Briefing On Preparing For Nuclear Detonation

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has scheduled a briefing for later this month on how to plan and prepare for a nuclear detonation. The briefing, for CDC employees, is part of a monthly series at the agency meant to "further strengthen CDC's common scientific culture and foster discussion and debate on major public health issues." (Hellmann, 1/4)

The New York Times: Virginia Official Pulls Republican's Name From Bowl To Pick Winner Of Tied Race

An official of the Virginia State Board of Elections pulled the name of David Yancey

from a blue and white stoneware bowl on Thursday, breaking a tied race that is pivotal to control of the state House of Delegates. The outcome in favor of Mr. Yancey, the Republican incumbent, means that the House remains narrowly in his party's hands, 51 seats to 49, after a Democratic wave in November propelled by anger at President Trump. ...Virginia Democrats had hoped that under Ralph Northam, the governor-elect and a Democrat, thwarted liberal priorities would break through a logjam of Republican control of both houses of the General Assembly. Expanding Medicaid in the state was high on that list. (Gabriel, 1/4)

Politico: Medicaid Expansion Fight Looms After Virginia Statehouse Drawing

A showdown over Obamacare's Medicaid expansion pitting Republican lawmakers against Virginia's newly elected governor is almost certain following the GOP victory in a drawing to decide control of the state's House of Delegates. The expected fight in a purple state demonstrates the law's staying power even as a Republican president and Congress work to undo it. (Pradhan, 1/4)

The Hill: Trump Poised To Take Action On Medicaid Work Requirements

The Trump administration is preparing to release guidelines soon for requiring Medicaid recipients to work, according to sources familiar with the plans, a major shift in the 50-year-old program. The guidelines will set the conditions for allowing states to add work requirements to their Medicaid programs for the first time, putting a conservative twist on the health insurance program for the poor. (Sullivan, 1/5)

The Wall Street Journal: CVS, Walgreens Say Drug Prices Are Easing After Years Of Ballooning

After years of surging U.S. drug prices, the two largest drugstore companies said some pricey prescription medicines are becoming more affordable. CVS Health Corp. and Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc. said Thursday that their pharmacy revenues are taking a hit from an increase in generic alternatives, particularly for some expensive specialty drugs, along with slowing price inflation for name-brand medications. (Terlep, 1/4)

The Wall Street Journal: Drug Industry Is Ripe For A Wave Of Deals

Nearly a decade ago, a wave of megamergers gripped the pharmaceutical industry. In 2018, conditions are right for a sequel. Back then, concerns about growth and tougher regulations spurred deals like Pfizer's \$68 billion acquisition of Wyeth and Merck & Co.'s \$41 billion acquisition of Schering-Plough. Today, growth concerns are rising again, and several other factors, including consolidation in other parts of health care, are setting the stage for another wave of deals. (Grant, 1/5)

The Hill: More Than Half Think Painkillers A Major Problem, But Not A National Emergency: Report

A little over half the country considers prescription painkiller addiction a major problem for the nation, but say it doesn't rise to the level of national emergency, a new report in the New England Journal of Medicine notes. In late October, President Trump declared the epidemic a national public health emergency; declaring some type of national emergency was the "first and most urgent" recommendation from the president's commission to address the opioid epidemic. (Roubein, 1/4)

Los Angeles Times: California Bills Aim To Tackle Opioid Addiction By Curbing Excessive Prescriptions

Looking to combat the opioid abuse epidemic, a Silicon Valley legislator has introduced a slate of bills meant to clamp down on access to highly addictive prescription drugs. Assemblyman Evan Low (D-Campbell) authored three measures meant to provide a better understanding of patients' access to these medications, building on an existing state database tracking prescriptions in California. "I don't think there's enough attention at the issue at hand, which is the system is not working," Low said. (Mason, 1/4)

The Washington Post: The Cancer Death Rate Has Dropped Again. Here's Why.

The nation's overall cancer death rate declined 1.7 percent in 2015, the latest indication of steady, long-term progress against the disease, according to a new report by the American Cancer Society. Over nearly a quarter-century, the mortality rate has fallen 26 percent, resulting in almost 2.4 million fewer deaths than if peak rates had continued. But the report, released Thursday, shows that Americans' No. 2 killer remains a formidable, sometimes implacable, foe. An estimated 609,000 people are expected to die of the ailment this year, while 1.74 million will be diagnosed with it. (McGinley, 1/4)

The Hill: Shortage Of IV Fluids Caused By Hurricane Expected To Improve

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is confident the shortage of saline IV fluids and bags caused by the hurricane that hit Puerto Rico last year will soon subside. The hurricane crippled a leading manufacturer ~~of~~ Baxter International — in Puerto Rico. But Baxter has announced all of their facilities on the island have returned to the commercial power grid, FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb said Thursday. (Hellmann, 1/4)

The Washington Post: Fewer Teens Having Sex As Declines In Risky Behaviors Continue

The number of high-school-aged teens who are having sex dropped markedly over a decade, a trend that includes substantial declines among younger students, African Americans and Hispanics, according to a new government report released Thursday.

The survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed especially steep declines in the past two years. It adds to evidence about ongoing progress in reducing risky behavior by teenagers, who are becoming pregnant, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol and using marijuana at lower rates than younger people before them, according to public health surveys. (Bernstein, 1/4)

The Hill: High School Students Having Less Sex, Government Study Finds

American high school students are having less sex than they were a decade ago, while those who are having sexual intercourse are doing so at a later age, according to a new government report. The research, released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), shows just over 41 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 reported having had sexual intercourse, down from almost 47 percent in 2005 and from 53 percent in 1995. (Wilson, 1/4)

The New York Times: New Shingles Vaccine Is Cost Effective

The new shingles vaccine is expensive, but worth it, according to a new analysis in JAMA Internal Medicine. Shingles is a painful and sometimes debilitating nerve inflammation and blistering skin rash caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. Anyone who has had chickenpox is susceptible to it many years later. (Bakalar, 1/4)

The New York Times: Antioxidants Don't Ease Muscle Soreness After Exercise

Many people take antioxidants before or after exercise in the belief that this prevents muscle soreness. A thorough review of the scientific literature has found no solid evidence that it works. Researchers pooled data from 50 randomized placebo-controlled trials involving 1,089 participants. Some studies looked at antioxidant supplements taken before exercise, some after. The type of antioxidant studied varied — cherry juice, pomegranate juice, vitamins C and E, black tea extract and others in various doses. The studies used supplements as powders, tablets and concentrates. (Bakalar, 1/4)

Los Angeles Times: L.A. County Officials Confirm First Case Of Sexually Transmitted Zika Virus

L.A. County officials said Thursday that a woman had been infected with the Zika virus by her partner in the first case of sexually transmitted Zika virus in the county. A man who lives in L.A. County traveled to Mexico and became infected with the Zika virus in early November, and shortly afterward his female partner, who didn't travel to Mexico, also developed the infection, officials said. (Karlamañgla, 1/4)

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First Edition

Monday, January 08, 2018

Visit Kaiser Health News for the latest headlines

Today's early morning highlights from the major news organizations.

Kaiser Health News: Care Suffers As More Nursing Homes Feed Money Into Corporate Webs

When one of Martha Jane Pierce's sons peeled back the white sock that had been covering his 82-year-old mother's right foot for a month, he discovered rotting flesh. "It looked like a piece of black charcoal" and smelled "like death," her daughter Cindy Hatfield later testified. After Pierce, a patient at a Memphis nursing home, was transferred to a hospital, a surgeon had to amputate much of her leg. One explanation for Pierce's lackluster care, according to financial records and testimony in a lawsuit brought by the Pierce family, is that her nursing home, Allenbrooke Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, appeared to be severely underfunded at the time, with a \$2 million deficit on its books in 2009 and a scarcity of nurses and aides. (Rau, 12/31)

Kaiser Health News: Running On Empty: CHIP Funding Could Run Out Jan. 19 For Some States

Some states are facing a mid-January loss of funding for their Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) despite spending approved by Congress in late December that was expected to keep the program running for three months, federal health officials said Friday. The \$2.85 billion was supposed to fund states' CHIP programs through March 31. But some states will start running out of money after Jan. 19, according to

the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. CMS did not say which states are likely to be affected first. (Galewitz, 1/5)

Kaiser Health News: An Opioid Remedy That Works: Treat Pain And Addiction At The Same Time

Seven years ago, Robert Kerley, who makes his living as a truck driver, was loading drywall when a gust of wind knocked him off the trailer. Kerley fell 14 feet and hurt his back. For pain, a series of doctors prescribed him a variety of opioids: Vicodin, Percocet and OxyContin. In less than a year, the 45-year-old from Federal Heights, Colo., said he was hooked. "I spent most of my time high, laying on the couch, not doing nothing, falling asleep everywhere," he said. (Daley, 1/8)

Politico: How Trump's HHS Nominee's Drug Company 'Gamed' Patent

When Donald Trump's nominee for HHS secretary was a top executive at Eli Lilly, the patent on its blockbuster Cialis was soon to expire. So Lilly tested it on kids. The drugmaker believed the erectile dysfunction drug might help a rare and deadly muscle-wasting disease that afflicts boys. The drug didn't work — but under a law that promotes pediatric research, Lilly was able to extend the Cialis patent anyway for six months — and that's worth a lot when a medication brings in over \$2 billion a year. (Karlin-Smith, 1/8)

The Associated Press: On Health Care, Democrats Are Shifting To Offense

Democrats are shifting to offense on health care, emboldened by successes in defending the Affordable Care Act. They say their ultimate goal is a government guarantee of affordable coverage for all. With Republicans unable to agree on a vision for health care, Democrats are debating ideas that range from single-payer, government-run care for all, to new insurance options anchored in popular programs like Medicare or Medicaid. There's also widespread support for authorizing Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices, an idea once advocated by candidate Donald Trump, which has languished since he was elected president. (1/8)

The New York Times: Medical Research? Congress Cheers. Medical Care? Congress Brawls.

They cannot agree on subsidies for low-income people under the Affordable Care Act or even how to extend funding for the broadly popular Children's Health Insurance Program — two issues requiring urgent attention as Congress returns to work. But a more exotic corner of the medical world has drawn rapturous agreement among Republicans and Democrats: the development of new treatments and cures through taxpayer-funded biomedical research. (Pear, 1/6)

The Washington Post: This Year Is Shaping Up To Be A Clash Of Republican Idealists Vs. Realists

President Trump huddled with congressional Republican leaders this weekend at Camp David, hoping to plot out the year ahead to give the GOP momentum as it heads into the winds of midterm elections. For some, that means swinging for the fences with another attempt to fully replace the Affordable Care Act or a dramatic rewrite of entitlement laws. But any sober analysis will lead the group to conclude that, once Congress cleans up important must-pass items over the next eight weeks, it should be a relatively quiet legislative year. (Kane, 1/6)

The Hill: Koch-Backed Groups Launch 'Right To Try' Campaign

Koch-brothers backed groups are launching a campaign urging Congress to pass legislation allowing terminally ill patients request access to experimental drugs the Food and Drug Administration hasn't approved. Nearly 40 states have this law, known as "Right to Try," already on their books. But Freedom Partners, in partnership with Americans for Prosperity, say federal legislation is needed to assuage patient fears that the federal government will override state laws. (Rouben, 1/8)

The Associated Press Fact Check: Trump Overstates Progress In Veterans' Care

In bountiful tweets and self-praise, President Donald Trump plays up "tremendous progress" in improving care for veterans in his first year. His claims fall short of reality. Trump's initiatives have yet to show meaningful impact, and his campaign promises of expanding access to doctors and adding mental health specialists are unfulfilled. (1/6)

The New York Times: Nuclear War Would Be 'Devastating,' So The C.D.C. Wants To Get People Prepared

President Trump's recent tweets about his big nuclear button may have been intended to deter a nuclear weapons exchange with North Korea, but the nation's top public health agency is taking the prospect of a nuclear attack seriously. On Jan. 16, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will present a workshop titled "Public Health Response to a Nuclear Detonation," for doctors, government officials, emergency responders and others whom, if they survived, would be responsible for overseeing the emergency response to a nuclear attack. (Kaplan, 1/5)

The New York Times: Trump, Defending His Mental Fitness, Says He's A 'Very Stable Genius' 0

President Trump, whose sometimes erratic behavior in office has generated an unprecedented debate about his mental health, declared on Saturday that he was perfectly sane and accused his critics of raising questions to score political points. In a series of Twitter posts that were extraordinary even by the standards of his norm-

shattering presidency, Mr. Trump insisted that his opponents and the news media were attacking his capacity because they had failed to prove his campaign conspired with Russia during the 2016 presidential campaign. (Baker and Haberman, 1/6)

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The Wall Street Journal: Trump Rejects Assertions In Book, Calling Self A 'Very Stable Genius'

President Donald Trump on Saturday continued to assail a new book that features sharp criticism of his administration from close advisers, and lamented what he called the nation's "weak" libel laws that he said allowed the book to be published. ... The author, Michael Wolff, frequented the West Wing during Mr. Trump's first year in office and met with at least a dozen administration officials. The book says White House advisers have had concerns about Mr. Trump's fitness for the presidency, in particular about his "lapses and repetitions." In a Thursday Hollywood Reporter column about his book, Mr. Wolff wrote: "At Mar-a-Lago, just before the new year, a heavily made-up Trump failed to recognize a succession of old friends." (Ballhaus, 1/6)

Politico: Trump Defends Mental Health: I'm A 'stable Genius'

Even Fox News, the president's most vocal media cheerleader, has started to acknowledge the questions about the president's state of mind, running a segment early Saturday morning titled, "Media questions Trump's mental state." Trump unleashed his Twitter rant just minutes after the Fox segment, further elevating the issue and ensuring that the topic gets more attention than ever, even as the White House tries to focus on crafting a legislative agenda. "Now that Russian collusion, after one year of intense study, has proven to be a total hoax on the American public, the Democrats and their lapdogs, the Fake News Mainstream Media, are taking out the old Ronald Reagan playbook and screaming mental stability and intelligence....." the president tweeted at 7:19 a.m. (Restuccia and Howie, 1/6)

Politico: 25th Amendment Unlikely To Be Invoked Over Trump's Mental Health

Donald Trump's description of himself as a "very stable genius" sparked new debate this weekend about the 25th Amendment, but invoking the provision to remove a president from office is so difficult that it's highly unlikely to come into play over concerns about Trump's mental health, a half-dozen lawyers with expertise on the measure said. (Gerstein, 1/7)

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The Washington Post: Families And Friends Of Addicts Are Stocking Up On Narcan, A Drug That Can Stop An Overdose In Its Tracks

Beth Schmidt always begins her opioid-awareness sessions by introducing her boy. At one such event, she motions toward his photos — the solemn baseball-team picture, his sweet, clean-cut middle school portrait, the cheek-to-cheek selfie of mother and son — as she tells a hushed audience of about a dozen how Sean fought and lost his battle with opioid addiction. “He actually overdosed right here in Mount Airy at the Twin Arch Shopping Center,” she says, “in a parked car.” It was December 2013, two days after his 23rd birthday. (Fleming, 1/7)

The Washington Post: Narcan Stops Overdoses And In Most Stes Is Available At Drug Stores Without Prescriptions

Forty-six states permit naloxone to be purchased without an individual prescription. Laws in the remaining states vary, with some permitting naloxone to be prescribed only for use on a patient of the prescriber, while others permit it to be prescribed for use on other people, such as friends and family members of the patient. In the District of Columbia, Narcan is available at retail pharmacies only via prescription. At least three community health organizations — HIPS, Family Medical and Counseling Service and Bread for the City — disburse it free without a prescription to clients and family members. (Fleming, 1/7)

The Associated Press: Fatal Overdoses Prompt County To Issue Public Health Alert

Authorities in one Maryland county have issued a public health alert after four people died from drug overdoses. The Carroll County Times reported that the health officials in the county seat of Westminster sent out the alert Friday. It warned that heroin, cocaine and counterfeit pain and anxiety pills may be laced with fentanyl. The synthetic opioid can be deadly, even in small doses. Carroll County is northwest of Baltimore. (1/7)

The New York Times: You're Over 75, And You're Healthy. Why Are You Taking A Statin?

Should a 76-year-old who doesn't have heart disease, but does have certain risk factors for developing it, take a statin to ward off heart attacks or strokes? You'd think we'd have a solid answer to this question. These widely prescribed medications lower cholesterol to reduce cardiovascular disease, the nation's most common killer, and get much of the credit for the nation's plummeting rates of heart attacks and strokes. (Span, 1/5)

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The Washington Post: New High Blood Pressure Guidelines Can Be Confusing Even For Doctors

When headlines about new blood pressure guidelines pinged across my phone

recently, I remembered a man my inpatient team had admitted to the hospital not long ago. He had gotten up in the middle of the night to use the toilet and passed out, hitting his head on the floor. The first people to find him described him twitching, so he initially got a battery of tests to determine whether he was having seizures. All were negative. But when he got out of bed and stood up, his blood pressure dropped from 137/63 to 98/50 — a sign of a condition called orthostatic hypotension. (Marcus, 1/7)

The Washington Post: Some Pretty Simple Lifestyle Changes Can Help With High Blood Pressure

If you're worried about high blood pressure, there are some things you can do beyond taking appropriate medication. The American Heart Association (AHA) points to some not-so-difficult lifestyle changes to delay or lower high pressure and reduce the risk of illnesses associated with it, such as heart disease, stroke and kidney disease. (1/7)

USA Today: Apple Urged To Do More To Combat iPhone Addiction Among Kids

Apple should do more to curb growing smartphone addiction among children, two major investors in the iPhone maker said Monday. In an open letter to the technology giant, New York-based Jana Partners LLC and the California State Teachers' Retirement System, highlighted increasing concern about the effects of gadgets and social media on youngsters. (Hjelmgaard, 1/8)

The Wall Street Journal: iPhones And Children Are A Toxic Pair, Say Two Big Apple Investors

"Apple can play a defining role in signaling to the industry that paying special attention to the health and development of the next generation is both good business and the right thing to do," the shareholders wrote in the letter, a copy of which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. "There is a developing consensus around the world including Silicon Valley that the potential long-term consequences of new technologies need to be factored in at the outset, and no company can outsource that responsibility." (Benoit, 1/7)

NPR: Alcohol A Problem? This Tool Helps Assess Risk And Find Help

The thinking about problem drinking and alcoholism has changed. It's no longer considered a black-and-white, you have it or you don't condition. "We now know that there's a full spectrum in alcohol use disorder," says George Koob, the director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, part of the National Institutes of Health. You can have a mild, moderate or severe problem. And there's not a one-sized fits all approach to getting help. (Aubrey, 1/8)

NPR: Stomach Reduction Surgery Benefits Severely Obese Teens

After three years, teens with severe obesity who underwent stomach reduction surgery to lose weight also significantly improved their heart health. A study published Monday in Pediatrics shows that blood pressure, cholesterol, inflammation and insulin levels all improved, particularly among those who lost the most weight. "The potential impact of such risk reduction translates into a reduced likelihood of developing significant heart disease later in life, including atherosclerosis, heart failure and stroke," says study author Marc Michalsky, surgical director of the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, in an email. (Haelle, 1/8)

USA Today: Autistic Boy's Drowning Is Now A Lesson For First Responders

Shalom Lawson, an 8-year-old Louisville boy who loved hugging people he just met, wandered from a relative's home last summer and drowned. He had autism, a disorder that causes many children to walk off. "Elopers," as they are called, are especially drawn to water and are unaware of the risks. "Water makes them feel calm, but water is very, very dangerous," said Shalom's mother, Magdalene Lawson, who came to America from West Africa with her husband, Charles. (Warren, 1/5)

The Washington Post: Why Do People Talk, And Even Curse, In Their Sleep?

Worried you might say something you regret when talking in your sleep? Your concerns may be justified: According to a recent study from France, your midnight mumblings may be more negative and insulting than what you say while awake. In the study, researchers found that sleep talkers said the word "no" four times as often in their sleep as when awake. And the f-word popped up during sleep talking more than 800 times more frequently than while awake. (Edison, 1/7)

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The Associated Press: Report: Privatized Medicaid Saving Iowa Less Than Predicted

Iowa's shift to privately-managed Medicaid will save the state 80 percent less money this year than originally predicted, according to a new state estimate. A quarterly report prepared by Iowa Department of Human Services staff members says the state now stands to save \$47.1 million this fiscal year by having private companies manage the \$4 billion program, the Des Moines Register reported Saturday. (1/6)

The Associated Press: Florida Hack Exposed Files Of Up To 30,000 Medicaid Patients

Florida officials say hackers may have accessed the personal information and medical records of up to 30,000 Medicaid recipients two months ago. The state's Agency for Health Care Administration said in a Friday evening news release that one of its

employees "was the victim of a malicious phishing email" on Nov. 15, and on Tuesday, agency leaders were notified about the preliminary findings of an Inspector General investigation. It found that hackers may have partly or fully accessed the enrollees' full names, Medicaid ID numbers, birthdates, addresses, diagnoses, medical conditions and Social Security numbers. (1/5)

Los Angeles Times: Severe Flu Brings Medicine Shortages, Packed ERs And A Rising Death Toll In California

So many people have fallen sick with influenza in California that pharmacies have run out of flu medicines, emergency rooms are packed, and the death toll is rising higher than in previous years. Health officials said Friday that 27 people younger than 65 have died of the flu in California since October, compared with three at the same time last year. Nationwide and in California, flu activity spiked sharply in late December and continues to grow. (Karamangla, 1/6)

Los Angeles Times: No, It's Not Too Late To Get A Flu Shot

Is it too late to get a flu shot? We know you've been busy making plans for the holidays, scrambling to find the perfect gift for everyone on your list, spending time in airports and on road trips to see family and friends. But the holiday season is over and it's time to get back to reality. The flu season is most certainly upon us. And you need to deal with it. (Kaplan, 1/5)

Los Angeles Times: In This Deadly Flu Season, Here Are Tips On How To Protect Yourself

California is in the midst of a dangerous flu season. Health officials said Friday that 27 people younger than 65 have died of the flu in California since October, compared with three during the same time period last year. Nationwide, flu activity spiked sharply in late December and continues to grow. Here is some key information, including tips to stay healthy, from national, state and local health agencies (1/6)

The Wall Street Journal: Hospitals Wrestle With Shortage Of IV Bags, Linked To Hurricane

The U.S. is facing a nationwide shortage of intravenous bags just as flu cases accelerate, forcing many hospitals to use more time-consuming ways to administer drugs and to weigh a halt on elective procedures and clinical trials. Some hospital officials said they have only a day or two of supplies and worry whether they would be able to handle an influx of patients as the influenza virus ramps up. Forty-six states are seeing widespread flu activity, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, putting this year on par with 2014-15, which was the most severe flu season in recent years. (Armour and Burton, 1/7)

The New York Times: Man Who Posed As A Doctor At 18 Is Going To Prison At 20

He wore a white lab coat and a stethoscope, but as several would-be patients in South Florida learned in 2015 and 2016, Malachi A. Love-Robinson was no doctor. Mr. Love-Robinson, who was 18 when he was accused of practicing medicine without a license, pleaded guilty to several charges on Thursday, and was sentenced to three and a half years in prison. The charges included grand theft from a person over 65 — prosecutors said he stole money and checks from an 86-year-old woman he was seeing as a patient. (Victor, 1/5)

The New York Times: City's New Public Hospitals Chief Will Focus On Primary Care

The incoming president of NYC Health & Hospitals wants to turn the nation's largest public health care network into an agency that focuses less on hospitalized care and more on primary care, similar to initiatives carried out nationwide. The new president, Dr. Mitchell H. Katz, who begins his job on Monday, also said he would expand the use of eConsult, an electronic health management system to streamline care and reduce wait times for specialty appointments, evaluate staff allocation and consider decreasing administrative services such as "unnecessary consultant expenses" to increase savings and revenue. (Ransom, 1/7)

Reuters: Court Voids Baltimore Law Requiring 'No Abortion' Clinic Disclaimers

A federal appeals court on Friday declared unconstitutional a Baltimore law requiring pregnancy clinics that do not offer or refer women for abortions to post signs disclosing that fact in their waiting rooms. The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 3-0 that the law violated the First Amendment free speech rights of the Greater Baltimore Center for Pregnancy Concerns, a Christian nonprofit that provides prenatal services and counsels women on abortion alternatives. (Stempel, 1/5)

The Associated Press: University Launches Investigation Into Fetal Tissue Transfer

The University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center is investigating the transfer of fetal tissue by a faculty member to a private medical research company in Michigan. Health Sciences Center spokeswoman Alex Sanchez confirmed the internal investigation Friday after it was first reported by the Albuquerque Journal. She said the inquiry began in the fall but she declined to provide any details. (1/5)

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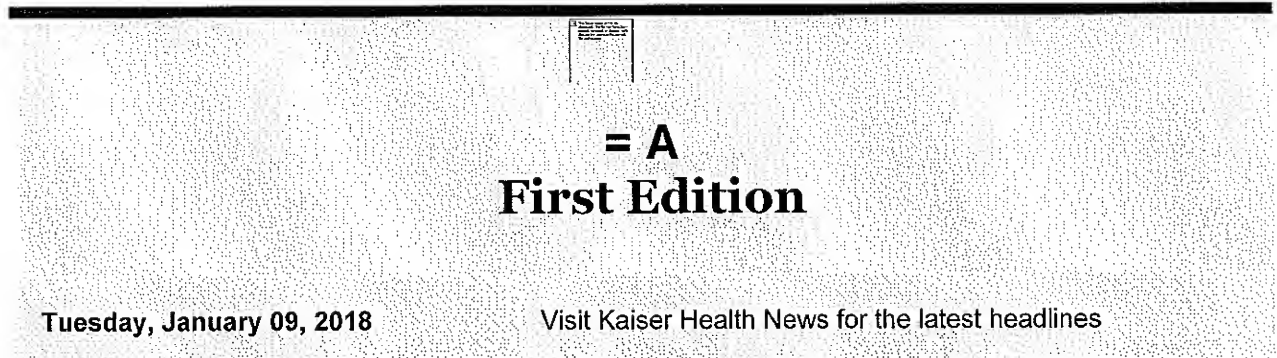
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Today's early morning highlights from the major news organizations.

Kaiser Health News: Her Sister's Keeper: Caring For A Sibling With Mental Illness

When sisters Jean and Ruby were growing up in Harlem, they invented a game of make-believe called "Eartha." The little girls would put on their prettiest dresses and shiniest shoes and sit down to tea as grown-up ladies. They discussed details of their hoped-for husbands and children, and all the exciting things they would do together. But 45 years later, the sisters' lives are nothing like they imagined. Ruby Wilson, 54, has paranoid schizophrenia and lives in an assisted living facility in North Carolina. Her sister Jean Moore, 57, is her legal guardian. (Gold, 1/9)

Kaiser Health News: VA Clears The Air On Talking To Patients About Marijuana Use

"Don't ask, don't tell" is how many veterans have approached health care conversations about marijuana use with the doctors they see from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Worried that owning up to using the drug could jeopardize their VA benefits — even if they're participating in a medical marijuana program approved by their state — veterans have often kept mum. That may be changing under a new directive from the Veterans Health Administration urging vets and their physicians to open up on the subject. (Andrews, 1/9)

Kaiser Health News: Despite Prod By ACA, Tax-Exempt Hospitals Slow To Expand Community Benefits

The federal health law's efforts to get nonprofit hospitals to provide more community-wide benefits in exchange for their lucrative tax status has gotten off to a slow start, new research suggests. And some experts predict that a recent repeal of a key provision of the law could further strain the effort. The increased emphasis on community-wide benefits was mandated by the Affordable Care Act. The health law required hospitals that meet federal tax standards to be nonprofits to perform a community health needs assessment (CHNA) every three years, followed by implementing a strategy to deal with issues confronting the community, such as preventing violence or lowering the rates of diabetes. (Connor, 1/8)

California Healthline: Defending Against This Season's Deadly Flu: 5 Things To Know Now

Aja C. Holmes planned to go to work last week, but her flu symptoms — a cough, fever and severe body aches that worsened overnight — had other ideas. "It felt like somebody took a bat and beat my body up and down," said Holmes, 39, who works as a residential life director at California State University-Sacramento. "I couldn't get out of bed." The nation is having a Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad flu season. (Ostrov, 1/8)

The Washington Post: Senate Finance Committee To Evaluate Alex Azar To Be The Next HHS Secretary

Alex Azar, the White House's choice to become the second health and human services secretary in less than a year, will appear for his Senate confirmation hearing Tuesday, giving Democrats a chance to probe his drug industry ties but not halt his path toward joining the president's Cabinet. The 10 a.m. hearing before the Senate Finance Committee will give Azar's Democratic critics a forum to contend that his role in helping to approve rising pharmaceutical prices while a top executive of Eli Lilly means he is ill-suited to carry out President Trump's stated goal of making medicines more affordable. (Goldstein and Eilperin, 1/8)

Politico: HHS Nominee's Mission Is To Finish The Job On Obamacare

President Donald Trump's pick for Health and Human Services secretary is on the verge of taking control of the department with a clear mandate: Take down Obamacare from the inside. With Republicans stalled on repeal, the GOP is looking to Alex Azar to put a conservative stamp on the health care system through shrewd rulemaking and the use of expansive regulatory powers — and all without the help of a Congress that's failed to scrap the 2010 health care law. (Cancryn, 1/9)

The Hill: House Dems Sound Alarm About Trump Health Nominee

A group of House Democrats want the Senate Finance Committee to question President Trump's nominee for Health and Human Services secretary about high drug prices at his former employer, Eli Lilly. In a letter to Finance Committee leaders, led by Texas Reps. Beto O'Rourke and Lloyd Doggett, the Democrats said Alex Azar should also be pressed on his commitment to uphold the Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as ObamaCare. (Weixel, 1/8)

The Hill: Pro-ACA Group Urges 'No' Vote On Trump Health Nominee

A leading pro-ObamaCare group is urging senators to vote "no" on President Trump's Health and Human Services secretary nominee, saying he will continue a campaign of "sabotage" against the health law. The group, Protect Our Care, unveiled a digital ad that urges lawmakers to oppose the nominee, Alex Azar. (Sullivan, 1/8)

The Associated Press: Budget Office Cuts Cost Estimate Of Children's Insurance

Congress' official budget analysts have eased one stumbling block to lawmakers' fight over renewing a program that provides health insurance for nearly 9 million low-income children. The Congressional Budget Office says a Senate bill adding five years of financing to the program would cost \$800 million. Previously, the analysts estimated it would cost \$8.2 billion. That means lawmakers should find it much easier to agree to a way to pay for extending the program. (1/8)

The Wall Street Journal: Republicans Scale Down Agenda For Safety-Net Programs, Health Law

Republicans are scaling back their ambitions to overhaul safety-net programs and dismantle the Affordable Care Act following President Donald Trump's weekend retreat with GOP leaders, due to concerns they can't muster enough support ahead of the 2018 midterm elections. Instead, Republican lawmakers are likely to embrace a slimmed-down agenda focused on the basics, including funding the government, raising the government debt limit and striking a deal on immigration, according to GOP lawmakers and aides. (Peterson and Armour, 1/9)

Reuters: Factbox: What Republicans Mean When They Talk About U.S. Welfare Reform

President Donald Trump had indicated he would like to rein in spending on U.S. social welfare programs to follow up on his 2017 victory in overhauling the U.S. tax code. Some Republicans, including House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan, welcomed the effort. Others, including Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, indicated they are hesitant to tackle this politically volatile issue in a congressional election year. (Becker, 1/8)

Reuters: Centene Says Over 1.4 Million Sign Up For Obamacare Plans

U.S. health insurer Centene Corp said on Monday more than 1.4 million people had paid for its insurance plans via the federal Obamacare marketplace as of Jan. 7. "The growth in the exchange has been so dramatic ... We had planned on incremental growth, but not that much," Centene Chief Executive Michael Neidorff said, adding "We've had people working all weekend, playing catchup." (Mathias, 1/8)

The Hill: Profit Outlook Brightens For ObamaCare Insurers

The ObamaCare doomsday scenario that many Republicans and Democrats predicted for 2018 is unlikely to come to pass, with insurers having adapted to the uncertainty that marked President Trump's first year in office. Insurers who decided to stick with ObamaCare after a tumultuous 2017 are likely to have a relatively profitable year, analysts and experts predict, for reasons including higher-than-expected enrollment. (Hellmann, 1/9)

The Associated Press: Maryland Officials To Announce Plan To Protect ACA

Maryland lawmakers are scheduled to outline a plan on how to protect and improve the federal Affordable Care Act in Maryland. Lawmakers will announce the plan Tuesday in Annapolis. State Sens. Brian Feldman and Jim Rosapepe are scheduled to attend, as well as Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk. (1/9)

Stat: In States That Didn't Expand Medicaid, Hospital Closures Have Spiked

In recent years Obamacare's Medicaid expansion has created a financial fault line in American health care. Hospitals in states that enacted the expansion got a wave of newly insured patients, while those in states that rejected it were left with large numbers of uninsured individuals. A new study released Monday reports a crucial consequence of that divide: Nonexpansion states have suffered a significant increase in hospital closures. States that expanded benefits, on the other hand, saw their rate of closures decline. (Ross, 1/8)

NPR: Hospitals In States With Medicaid Expansion Are Surviving

The expansion of Medicaid helps rural hospitals stay afloat in states like Colorado, which added 400,000 people to the health insurance program under the Affordable Care Act. Hospitals in states that expanded Medicaid were about 6 times less likely to close than hospitals in non-expansion states, according to a study by researchers at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. (Daley, 1/8)

The New York Times: Already 'Moderately Severe,' Flu Season In U.S. Could Get Worse

This winter's flu season is turning into a "moderately severe" one that might get

worse because of an imperfect vaccine and steady cold weather, flu experts and public health officials said this week. The flu is now widespread across the country and the peak of transmission probably occurred during the Christmas-New Year's holiday week, just as many people were crowded into planes, buses and cars or in large family gatherings, said Dr. Daniel B. Jernigan, director of the influenza division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (McNeil, 1/8)

The Washington Post: The White House Struggles To Silence Talk Of Trump's Mental Fitness

The White House is struggling to contain the national discussion about President Trump's mental acuity and fitness for the job, which has overshadowed the administration's agenda for the past week. Trump publicly waded into the debate spawned by a new book, "Fire and Fury" — Michael Wolff's inside account of the presidency — over the weekend by claiming on Twitter that he is "like, really smart" and "a very stable genius." In doing so, the president underscored his administration's response strategy — by being forceful and combative — while also undermining it by gleefully entering a debate his aides have tried to avoid. (Rucker and Parker, 1/8)

Stat: How To Determine Trump's Mental Fitness? Reliable Cognitive Tests Exist

When President Trump has his physical exam on Friday, there is little chance he will repeat the same story within a span of 10 minutes or fail to recognize old friends, as the explosive new book "Fire and Fury" by Michael Wolff asserts he has done in the past. But the mental deterioration that causes such memory lapses would be detectable on standard cognitive tests. The White House told reporters on Monday that psychiatric tests would not be conducted as part of the president's physical, but did not explicitly rule out cognitive assessments. (Begley, 1/9)

Politico: Is Trump Mentally Fit? Don't Count On His Physical To Tell You

If President Donald Trump were any other 71-year-old — covered by Medicare and having his annual wellness visit — he'd be checked on his cognitive functions and possible safety risks. But when the president goes for his physical exam Friday, the White House said his mental fitness won't be tested. And there's no guarantee that the public would find out the results of cognitive tests if Trump were to take them. White House deputy press secretary Hogan Gidley said such tests are not part of the president's planned physical. "He's sharp as a tack. He's a workhorse, and he demands his staff be the same way," he told reporters aboard Air Force One. (Diamond and Cancryn, 1/8)

Los Angeles Times: Banning Seven Words At The CDC Would Have At Least Seven Serious Consequences For Public Health

"It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words," George Orwell writes in the fifth chapter

of his dystopian novel, "1984." Four public health experts from Emory University in Atlanta, just a stone's throw from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, beg to differ. In an editorial published Monday in the Annals of Internal Medicine, they said it would be "damning, immoral and unacceptable" for CDC officials to act on reported admonitions from the Trump administration to avoid the use of seven words and phrases in the agency's official budget documents. (Healy, 1/8)

The Washington Post: Court To Weigh If One Parent Has The Right To Use Frozen Embryos If The Other Objects

During three emotional days of divorce talks, Drake and Mandy Rooks managed to agree on how to divide up almost every aspect of their old lives down to the last piece of furniture. Only one thing remained: the frozen embryos. There were six of them, created from his sperm and her eggs, and they had been left over from when the couple had gone through in vitro fertilization some years earlier. The couple had had three children using the technology, and Drake was done. He didn't want any more children in general, and certainly not with Mandy. She felt differently. (Cha, 1/9)

Los Angeles Times: Why The United States Is 'the Most Dangerous Of Wealthy Nations For A Child To Be Born Into'

It's no surprise that the United States ranks absolutely last in child mortality among the world's wealthiest countries — that's been true for years. A new study examines how this sad situation came to be. According to data from the World Health Organization and the global Human Mortality Database, the problems go all the way back to the 1960s. It was during that decade that the U.S. infant mortality rate (for babies less than a year old) and the U.S. childhood mortality rate (for those between the ages of 1 and 19) began to exceed the combined rates for the other 19 richest nations. (Kaplan, 1/8)

The New York Times: Brain Surgery In 3-D: Coming Soon To The Operating Theater

One blue surgical drape at a time, the patient disappeared, until all that showed was a triangle of her shaved scalp. "Ten seconds of quiet in the room, please," said Dr. David J. Langer, the chairman of neurosurgery at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan, part of Northwell Health. Silence fell, until he said, "O.K., I'll take the scissors." His patient, Anita Roy, 66, had impaired blood flow to the left side of her brain, and Dr. Langer was about to perform bypass surgery on slender, delicate arteries to restore the circulation and prevent a stroke. (Grady, 1/8)

NPR: Experimental Capsule Samples Gases As It Passes Through The Gut

To study the human gut and the microbes that live within it, scientists have a couple of options. They can grab a small piece of tissue from the gastrointestinal tract or collect a sample of fecal matter. Neither way is ideal, says Jack Gilbert, a microbiologist and

director of the Microbiome Center at the University of Chicago. "By studying [the sample], you're changing it, just by observing it, because you have to cut it out and analyze it," he says. (Chen, 1/8)

The Wall Street Journal: Apple Defends Its Smartphone Practices For Children After Investor Critique

Apple Inc. defended its record of providing parental controls and other protections for children who use its iPhones and other devices, after a pair of prominent investors called on the tech giant to take more steps to curb the ill effects of smartphones. In a statement late Monday, Apple said that its mobile software includes extensive parental controls governing different types of content and applications, noting that it started offering some of them as early as 2008. (Mickle, 1/8)

USA Today: Dry January: What Are The Benefits? And Is It Worth It?

With the booze-filled December behind us, many Americans will try to make up for their egg-nogs, wines and other holiday spirits with Dry January, a 31-day break from all alcohol. The practice gained popularity after a British nonprofit promoted it in 2013, becoming a government-backed public health campaign the next year aimed at improving health, trimming waistlines and fattening wallets. But will putting down the bottles for a month make up for the recent weeks' revelry? Yes and no, according to a smattering of data and experts on the subject. It might depend on your goal. (Hafner, 1/8)

Stat: Intellia And Editas Play Down CRISPR Findings, As Shares Fall On New Paper

Top executives for genome-editing companies on Monday pushed back against a new unpublished paper that raised concerns about preexisting immune responses to CRISPR-based therapies, insisting the issues outlined in the study were either already being addressed or were not relevant to the medicines being developed. The paper, which was posted Friday on the preprint site bioRxiv, sent shares of Intellia Therapeutics and Editas Medicine down sharply Monday morning. Shares of CRISPR Therapeutics also declined. (Joseph, 1/8)

The Wall Street Journal: Walk-In Doctor Visits At Work? Welcome To The Office Health Center

On Wednesday mornings, Stephen Fealy, an orthopedic surgeon in New York, heads downtown to see his patients. But instead of going to his office, Dr. Fealy sees patients in theirs—at Goldman Sachs Group Inc. He examines a couple of dozen Goldman employees, from managing directors to junior analysts and administrative assistants. Dr. Fealy, a sports-medicine specialist with the Hospital for Special Surgery in New

York, works alongside several other physicians at the Goldman Sachs clinic on the 10th floor of the firm's headquarters, near Wall Street. (Lagnado, 1/8)

USA Today: Burn Injuries May Have Found Hairy Solution

Hairy skin may not seem like a desirable thing — until you don't have it. Burn and blast victims who require skin reconstruction often do not develop hair follicles or sweat glands on their new skin, which can have a physiological as well as cosmetic impact. Sweat glands aid with thermoregulation and hair can help mediate the sense of touch. So researchers have long sought a way to develop better replacement skin that would allow its wearer to sweat and sport hair, just like those who have not undergone such procedures. (Rudavsky, 1/9)

Los Angeles Times: Romaine Lettuce Is A Bad Choice Right Now, Health Agencies Warn

If you've somehow missed the huge warnings so far, we beg of you: Do not eat romaine lettuce. There's no official government recall in the United States - yet. But with two dead and many more sickened in the United States and Canada, major health organizations are advising you avoid the stuff. This all began in December, when the Canadian Government warned consumers to avoid romaine due to potential contamination with E. coli. (van Hare, 1/8)

The New York Times: A Heart Risk Factor Even Doctors Know Little About

To millions of Americans, Bob Harper was the picture of health, a celebrity fitness trainer who whipped people into shape each week on the hit TV show "The Biggest Loser." But last February, Mr. Harper, 52, suffered a massive heart attack at a New York City gym and went into cardiac arrest. He was saved by a bystander who administered CPR and a team of paramedics who rushed him to a hospital, where he spent two days in a coma. (O'Connor, 1/9)

The Washington Post: Feds Approve Extension Of Maryland's 'All Payer' Hospital Model

Federal health officials have authorized Maryland to continue its unique "all payer" health-care model for hospitals through 2019, while the state seeks approval to apply a similar plan to outpatient service providers such as doctors, skilled nurses and rehabilitation centers. Officials say expanding the program, which regulates how much hospitals can charge in exchange for having the federal government cover a larger share of Medicare costs than it does in other states, is one of the strongest steps Maryland can take to fulfill a federal requirement to lower its annual Medicare costs by \$330 million. (Hicks, 1/8)

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First Edition

Wednesday, January 10, 2018

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Today's early morning highlights from the major news organizations.

Kaiser Health News: HHS Nominee Vows To Tackle High Drug Costs, Despite His Ties To Industry

Senate Democrats on Tuesday pressed President Donald Trump's nominee for the top health post to explain how he would fight skyrocketing drug prices — demanding to know why they should trust him to lower costs since he did not do so while running a major pharmaceutical company. Alex M. Azar II, the former president of the U.S. division of Eli Lilly and Trump's pick to run the Department of Health and Human Services, presented himself as a "problem solver" eager to fix a poorly structured health care system during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Finance Committee. Azar said addressing drug costs would be among his top priorities. (Huetteman, 1/9)

Kaiser Health News: A Poor Neighborhood In Chicago Looks To Cuba To Fight Infant Mortality

Over the past few months, medical professionals on Chicago's South Side have been trying a new tactic to bring down the area's infant mortality rate: find women of childbearing age and ask them about everything. Really, everything. "In the last 12 months, have you had any problems with any bug infestations, rodents or mold?" Dr. Kathy Tossas-Milligan, an epidemiologist, asked Yolanda Flowers during a recent visit

to her home, in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood. "Have you ever had teeth removed or crowned because of a cavity?" (Bryan, 1/10)

California Healthline: Listen: How A 'Hippie Clinic' In San Francisco Inspired A Medical Philosophy

Fifty-one years ago in San Francisco, a small community clinic opened its doors. Its mission: to treat many of the young people who flocked to the city — who were often homeless, hungry and sick. The Haight Ashbury Free Clinic, now part of a larger network, still operates out of a second-floor office overlooking Haight Street in San Francisco, and it still helps people on the fringes of society. Carrie Feibel of San Francisco's KQED filed this radio story for NPR and KHN on the history of the clinic. (Feibel, 1/10)

The New York Times: Trump Likes Drug Price Negotiations; His Nominee For Health Secretary Doesn't

Alex M. Azar II, President Trump's nominee for secretary of health and human services, said Tuesday that he was wary of proposals for the government to negotiate drug prices for Medicare beneficiaries, an idea endorsed by Mr. Trump in the 2016 campaign. But Mr. Azar said that in some situations, he was willing to look at proposals to negotiate prices for a limited number of medicines. (Pear, 1/9)

The Associated Press: Trump Health Pick Wary Of Government Drug Price Negotiations

Alex Azar, a former pharmaceutical and government executive, acknowledged to the Senate Finance Committee that drug prices are too high and said he'd work to lower them if confirmed as secretary of Health and Human Services. But he said allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices across the board would risk restricting choice for patients, since the government would have to establish an approved list of discounted medications. (1/9)

Stat: HHS Nominee Azar Signals New Line Of Attack On Drug Prices

In that first hearing, Azar stuck to traditionally conservative policy ideas like encouraging the development of more generic drugs, including "a viable and robust biosimilar market," and limiting abuses of the patent system. This time, however, he hinted that he is open to other policies that might go further to address the list prices that drug makers charge. "There's no silver bullet here, though, I want to be very clear. There's not one action that all of a sudden fixes this," he said. (Mershon, 1/9)

Reuters: Health Secretary Nominee Indicates Support For Medicaid Overhaul

Azar appeared before the Senate Finance Committee on Tuesday, which will ultimately decide whether to move his nomination forward. Azar also vowed to uphold Obamacare

as long as it remained the law but said that the program needed changes. "I believe I have a very important obligation to make the program work as well as possible," Azar said during the wide-ranging hearing that lasted more than two hours. "What we have now is not working for people." (Abutaleb, 1/9)

The Wall Street Journal: Trump HHS Nominee Defends Pharmaceutical-Industry Ties At Senate Hearing

Mr. Azar said in a hearing before the Senate Finance Committee that his past position as president of an Eli Lilly & Co. affiliate gives him a unique advantage in tackling drug costs. "From having worked for the last several years in that space—this is such a complex area, the learning curve for any other individual would be so high," Mr. Azar said. Bringing down consumer prices would be a central goal, he said, adding, "There is no silver bullet here, I want to be very clear." Democrats said they had concerns about Mr. Azar's views on the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid spending, as well as his tenure in the pharmaceutical industry. (Armour, 1/9)

The Washington Post: Senate Finance Committee Evaluates Alex Azar To Be The Next HHS Secretary

The minority party's efforts during the Senate Finance Committee hearing did not appear to halt his path toward joining the president's Cabinet. Republicans bestowed superlatives on Azar and highlighted his senior roles at the Department of Health and Human Services for a half-dozen years in the early 2000s. And during nearly 2½ hours of questioning, the nominee delivered a polished, informed performance in the witness chair, assuring senators, who have at times felt slighted by administration officials, that he is eager to work with them. (Goldstein and Eilperin, 1/9)

Politico: Trump's HHS Pick Appears To Be On Track For Confirmation

The expected confirmation of Alex Azar, who appeared before a Senate panel Tuesday, would put the conservative policy expert in charge of rewriting the rules of the U.S. health care system with a broad mandate to use the powers to the fullest. And following a tumultuous year marked by failed Obamacare repeal efforts and the abrupt resignation of Trump's first HHS secretary, Republicans think Azar can ably get the Trump administration's health agenda on track. "Mr. Azar will be the administration's primary policy driver," Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) said during Azar's confirmation hearing. "I believe his record shows that he is more than capable of leading HHS through these next few consequential years." (Cancryn and Karlin-Smith, 1/9)

The Washington Post: Trump Seeks To Reduce Suicide Among Recent Veterans With New Executive Order

President Trump signed an executive order Tuesday aimed at expanding mental-health care for transitioning veterans as they leave the military, in an effort to reduce suicides in a group that is considered particularly at risk. The order will take effect March 9 and is expected to provide all new veterans with mental-health care for at least a year after they leave the military. Trump gave the Defense Department, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Veterans Affairs 60 days to iron out details and develop a joint plan, Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin said in phone call with reporters. (Lamothe, 1/9)

USA Today: Trump Expands Mental Health Benefits To Decrease Veteran Suicide Rates

Veterans who have recently left the military are between two and three times more likely to commit suicide than active duty service members, and nearly 20% of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or depression. The order directs the departments of Defense, Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs to submit a plan within 60 days to provide "seamless access to mental health treatment and suicide prevention resources." "We want them to get the highest care and the care they so richly deserve," Trump said. (Slack, 1/9)

The Hill: Alexander, Trump Discussed ObamaCare Fix In Nashville

Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) says he spoke to President Trump on Monday about a bipartisan bill aimed at stabilizing ObamaCare markets and that Trump again expressed his support for the measure. Alexander told reporters Tuesday that Trump asked about the bill when the two appeared together at an event in Tennessee on Monday. Alexander said he told the president he would get back to him after meeting with Sens. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine) this week. (Sullivan, 1/9)

The Hill: ObamaCare Repeal Fades From GOP Priorities List In New Year

The chances of repealing ObamaCare this year are fading further, with top Republicans saying they hardly discussed repeal of the law during a Camp David retreat last weekend focused on their 2018 agenda. Meanwhile, Republicans say talk of welfare or entitlement reform this year is also narrowing down to an emphasis on things like job training, not the broad overhaul of Medicare, Medicaid and other entitlements that Democrats have warned against.

The Hill: Maryland State Lawmakers Propose Replacement For Repealed ObamaCare Mandate

State lawmakers in Maryland are looking to replace ObamaCare's individual mandate, which was repealed by Republicans in Congress last month. A proposal in Maryland

would require people to pay a penalty for not having insurance. The money, though, could be used as a down payment for a health insurance plan. (Hellmann, 1/9)

The Hill: Trump Admin To Settle \$3M In Legal Fees Over Obama-Era Contraception Mandate: Report

The Trump administration has agreed to pay \$3 million to settle lawsuits filed against the Affordable Care Act's mandate for contraception coverage, BuzzFeed News reported on Tuesday. The amount went to the law firm Jones Day, which represented dozens of groups that sued the Obama administration over the mandate, according to BuzzFeed. (Delk, 1/9)

Los Angeles Times: Parents Agonize Over Their Kids' Health As Funding For Children's Insurance Program Remains In Doubts

It was an anxious Christmas and New Year's for the Belt family. Tracy and B.J. Belt for years have lived paycheck to paycheck, as B.J.'s truck-driving job at a quarry in the hills around Morgantown hasn't left much for luxuries. But this holiday season, the Belts had a new worry. Their two boys, Bobby and Dylan, may soon be uninsured, leaving 11-year-old Bobby without the costly medicine and blood monitors he needs to control his Type 1 diabetes. (Levey, 1/9)

The New York Times: Trump's First Full Physical Is Approaching. What He Discloses Is Up To Him.

President Trump is a commander in chief who fuels himself with a steady stream of Diet Cokes, scoops of vanilla ice cream and slabs of red meat. He gets as little as five hours of sleep a night. He is not known to exercise more than the brief strolls beyond his cart on the golf course. This, he and his aides have maintained, is the very picture of presidential stamina. On Friday, Mr. Trump, 71, will undergo his first comprehensive physical examination as president, and the first formal check on his former doctor's Trumpian 2015 campaign claim that he'd be the "healthiest individual ever elected?" to the office. (Rogers and Altman, 1/9)

The Associated Press: Trump Faces Presidential Fitness Test Amid Raised Concerns

Trump raised concern last month when he slurred some words on national TV. When asked about it, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said questions about Trump's health were "frankly, pretty ridiculous" and blamed his slurred speech on a dry throat, "nothing more than that." More questions have been raised in the weeks since, given the tone of some of his tweets and the reported comments of some of the people who deal with him day to day. (Superville, 1/9)

Los Angeles Times: One Of The Most Promising Drugs For Alzheimer's Disease Fails In Clinical Trials

To the roughly 400 clinical trials that have tested some experimental treatment for Alzheimer's disease and come up short, we can now add three more. An experimental drug called idalopirdine failed to help people with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease in a trio of trials that involved 2,525 patients in 34 countries. Not only did the drug fail to bring about any meaningful change in cognitive tests that are widely used in diagnosing and tracking the progress of the disease, it also failed to cause significant improvements in general measures of daily function among those taking it at any of three tested doses. (Healy, 1/9)

Stat: A New Alzheimer's Drug, Once Worth Billions, Is Headed For The Trash

Axovant Sciences (AXON), 2017's most talked-about biotech company, is abandoning the drug that made it famous after yet another clinical trial failure. The company, valued at more than \$2.8 billion in September, will no longer study intepirdine after finding the drug to be useless against dementia with Lewy bodies, a memory-destroying disease that can affect mood and balance. Last year, intepirdine failed in a 1,300-patient Alzheimer's disease trial, sending Axovant's share price down more than 75 percent. (Garde, 1/8)

The Wall Street Journal: Despite Setbacks, Drugmakers Have Plans To Fight Alzheimer's

During the fiscal year 2017, the National Institutes of Health will have poured an estimated \$1.35 billion into Alzheimer's disease, almost triple its investment for fiscal year 2013. And Pfizer said it had plans to establish a corporate venture fund focused on neuroscience projects. Sales of successful treatments for the disorder could amount to billions of dollars as demand for therapies increase due to an aging population. Analysts had predicted that annual sales for Axovant's drug, known as intepirdine, could have topped \$2 billion. (Hernandez, Whalen and Prang, 1/8)

The Associated Press: Judge Urges Action On '100 Percent Manmade' Opioid Crisis

A federal judge on Tuesday set a goal of doing something about the nation's opioid epidemic this year, while noting the drug crisis is "100 percent man-made." Judge Dan Polster urged participants on all sides of lawsuits against drugmakers and distributors to work toward a common goal of reducing overdose deaths. He said the issue has come to courts because "no other branches of government have punted" it. (Welsh-Huggins, 1/9)

The Wall Street Journal: Federal Judge Seeks Speedy Resolution Of Opioid Lawsuits

"I don't think anyone in the country is interested in a whole lot of finger pointing at this point, and I'm not either," U.S. District Judge Dan Polster said Tuesday at the first gathering, in a Cleveland courtroom that was packed, of lawyers involved in the sprawling opioid litigation. Judge Polster is overseeing the consolidation of more than 200 cases filed in federal court by local governments, hospitals and other parties, all seeking to recoup the costs of opioid addiction from the manufacturers and distributors of the painkillers. (Randazzo, 1/9)

The Hill: Senate Dems Seek \$25B In Opioid Funding

Senate Democrats are pushing for an extra \$25 billion to be included in any final budget agreement to combat the opioid epidemic. Sens. Jeanne Shaheen and Maggie Hassan, a pair of New Hampshire Democrats who are leading the effort, said during a press conference Tuesday that the federal response to the crisis has been insufficient and negotiations over a long-term spending deal are an opportunity to change that. (Weixel, 1/9)

Stat: Senate Health Committee Hosts Opioid Hearing With One Witness: A Journalist

In its second hearing on the country's raging drug crisis since President Trump directed the Department of Health and Human Services to declare the matter a public health emergency in October, the Senate health committee called a hearing with a single witness: a journalist. Such hearings conventionally spotlight high-profile government officials and career advocates with deep expertise in a subject. Every hearing this committee and a similarly health-focused House panel held to specifically address the opioid epidemic since 2016 has featured at least four witnesses. A committee press staffer did not answer questions about why Sam Quinones was the only witness at this full committee hearing. (Swetlitz, 1/9)

The Associated Press: 3 Native American Tribes Sue Opioid Industry Groups

Three Native American tribes in the Dakotas are suing opioid manufacturers and distributors, alleging they concealed and minimized the addiction risk of prescription drugs. The Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe and the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate sued 24 opioid industry groups in federal court on Monday. Defendants include drug manufacturers Purdue Pharma, Teva Pharmaceutical Industries and Allergan, and distributors McKesson Corp., Cardinal Health Inc. and AmerisourceBergen Corp. (1/9)

NPR: Opioid Addiction Can Start With Expectations Of Pain-Free Hospital Stays

Doctors at some of the country's largest hospital chains admit they went overboard with

opioids to make people as pain-free as possible. Now the doctors shoulder part of the blame for the country's opioid crisis. In an effort to be part of the cure, they've begun to issue an uncomfortable warning to patients: You're going to feel some pain. (Farmer, 1/9)

The Wall Street Journal: Jump In HIV Cases Among Drug Users Seen In Northern Kentucky

Public-health officials in northern Kentucky are investigating a jump in HIV cases among people who inject drugs, the region's health department said Tuesday. The region, which includes four counties, recorded 37 new cases of HIV in 2017, up 48% from 25 cases in 2016, according to the Northern Kentucky Health Department. (Whalen and Campo-Flores, 1/9)

NPR: Opioid Crisis Leads Philadelphia To Consider 'Safe Injection' Sites

Top Philadelphia officials are advocating that the city become the first in the U.S. to open a supervised injection site, where people suffering from heroin or opioid addiction could use the drugs under medical supervision. But the controversial proposal aimed at addressing the city's deadly drug crisis must first overcome resistance from top city police officials, community residents and the federal government. (Allyn, 1/10)

The Hill: CDC Rejects Censorship Reports: 'There Are Absolutely No "Banned" Words'

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says it "has not banned, prohibited, or forbidden" the use of certain words in official documentation, the agency director says in response to concerns from Senate Democrats. Democrats had been concerned, they said last month, "that the Trump Administration is yet again prioritizing ideology over science" after reports claimed agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) had banned employees from using words including "fetus," "vulnerable" and "science-based." (Weixel 1/9)

The Wall Street Journal: Tillerson Orders Review Of U.S. Response To Mysterious Illnesses In Cuba

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will order a special panel to investigate the U.S. response to mysterious illnesses that have stricken American diplomats and their relatives in Havana. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the State Department have been probing the incidents in recent months after the administration said they resulted from attacks. Now, Mr. Tillerson will take the further step of establishing an independent board of the same type that was set up after the 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, a senior diplomat told lawmakers on Tuesday. (Schwartz, 1/9)

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The New York Times: Facial Exercises May Make You Look 3 Years Younger

Facial exercises may significantly reduce some of the signs of aging, according to an interesting new study of the effects of repeating specific, expressive movements on people's appearance. The study, published in JAMA Dermatology, found that middle-aged women looked about three years younger after a few months of exercising, perhaps providing a reasonable, new rationale for making faces behind our spouses' backs. (Reynolds, 1/10)

NPR: City Women Differ From Rural Counterparts In Age At First Sex, Number Of Kids

Where you live — in a city versus a rural area — could make a difference in how old you tend to be when you first have sex, what type of birth control you use and how many children you have. These are the findings from federal data collected using the National Survey of Family Growth, which analyzed responses from in-person interviews with more than 10,000 U.S. women, ages 18 to 44, between 2011 and 2015. (Neighmond, 1/9)

The Washington Post: Japanese Astronaut On The ISS Has Grown A Stunning 3½ Inches In Space

If you're short and want to gain a few inches, you're in luck — become an astronaut and feel taller. At least while you're in space. Japanese astronaut Norishige Kanai said Monday on Twitter that he is 3½ inches taller since arriving at the International Space Station on Dec. 19. Weightlessness has that effect: Without gravitational force compressing the spine, fluid between the discs fluctuates as they temporarily expand, like a coiled spring unspooled from the top. (Horton, 1/9)

The Associated Press: California Examines Prison Guards' High Suicide Rate

Correctional Officer Scott Jones kissed his wife goodbye on July 8, 2011, and headed off to a maximum-security prison in the remote high desert of northeastern California. He never came home. Jones' body was found a day later, along with a note explaining why the 36-year-old took his own life: "The job made me do it." (1/9)

Reuters: Florida Judge Blocks Abortion Delay Law, Rules It Unconstitutional

A Florida judge on Tuesday permanently blocked and declared unconstitutional a law requiring a woman to delay an abortion by at least 24 hours after making a visit to a doctor who would have to inform her of possible risks of the procedure. "Florida law subjects no other medical procedure, including those that pose greater health risks than

abortion, to a mandatory delay," Circuit Judge Terry Lewis wrote in his judgment. (Gonzales, 1/9)

The Associated Press: Group Home Administrator Pleads Guilty In Resident's Death

The former administrator of an Ohio group home has pleaded guilty to charges of reckless homicide and patient abuse in connection with the death of an 85-year-old resident. Fifty-five-year-old Alice Ramsey entered the plea Monday after reaching an agreement with prosecutors to drop a charge of involuntary manslaughter. (1/9)

The Wall Street Journal: New York Plans New, \$400 Million Public-Health Lab For Harlem Site

New York City will spend about \$400 million to build a new, public-health laboratory, a larger facility expected to open in about seven years on the campus of Harlem Hospital Center, officials said. The move, which is to be announced in the coming weeks, is intended to give the city's Department of Health & Mental Hygiene more flexibility for its lab equipment and help its staff work more easily in the event of a crisis such as Zika in 2016 and Ebola in 2014. (West, 1/9)

Los Angeles Times: California Flu Season Could Be One Of The Worst In A Decade, State Officials Say

California health officials said Tuesday that the state's flu season could turn out to be one of the nastiest the state has seen in a long time. "This appears to be one of the worst seasons we've had in the last 10 years," state epidemiologist Dr. Gil Chavez said in a call with reporters. "We're early, and we're trending up." (Karlman, 1/9)

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From: Kaiser Family Foundation
Sent: Wednesday, January 17, 2018 10:07 AM
To: Alexander, Steven
Subject: The Latest: State Specifics for Medicaid Work Requirements in Proposed Waivers; Updated Infographic on Medicaid and Opioid Epidemic; KHN on State Hurdles for Work-for-Medicaid Rule & More

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Kaiser Family Foundation's The Latest

January 17, 2018

MEDICAID

Medicaid and Work Requirements: New Guidance, State Waiver Details and Key Issues

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With the approval of Kentucky's Medicaid expansion waiver, CMS has for the first time granted a state permission to make Medicaid eligibility conditional on meeting a work requirement. Nine other states have waivers pending that would impose work

MEDICAID

Trump's Work-For-Medicaid Rule Puts Work On States' Shoulders

States considering whether to enact work requirement for adult Medicaid enrollees face major hurdles. They will have to figure out how to define the work requirement and alternative options, such as going to school or volunteering in some organizations; how to enforce the new rules; how to pay for new administrative costs; and how to handle the millions of enrollees likely to seek exemptions. (KHN)

requirements. A new brief highlights what the work requirements would be in each state, including what would count as work activities, the hours required, and what the common exemptions to the requirements would be. ([News Release](#), [Issue Brief](#))

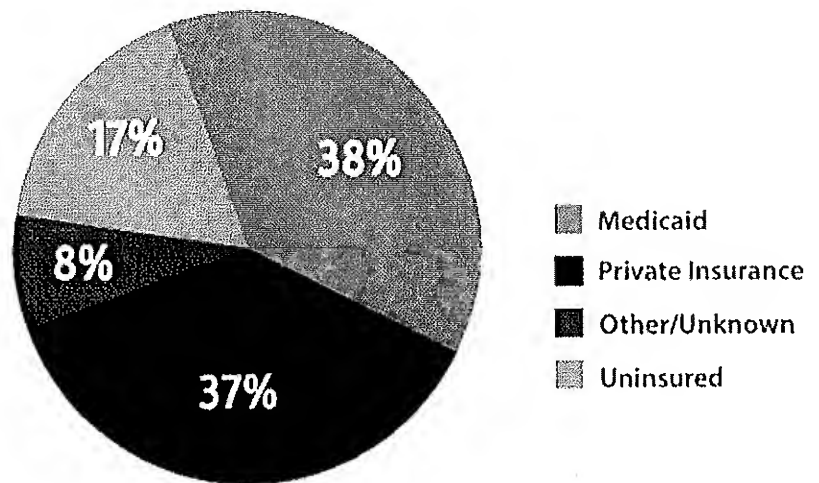
INFOGRAPHIC

Medicaid's Role in Addressing the Opioid Epidemic

Medicaid plays a central role in the nation's efforts to address the opioid epidemic. By covering people who are struggling with addiction and enhancing state capacity to provide early interventions and treatment, Medicaid is an important tool in the fight against the epidemic.

An updated infographic presents key data on the prevalence of opioid addiction and highlights the impact of the ACA and Medicaid expansion on the state-level response.

Medicaid covers nearly **4 in 10** nonelderly adults with opioid addiction.



TOTAL: 2 MILLION IN 2016

News and Headlines

News and headlines from Kaiser Health News (KHN) and California Healthline (CHL). Follow KHN on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, and CHL on Facebook and Twitter, for the latest updates.

- Trump's Work-For-Medicaid Rule Puts Work On States' Shoulders ([KHN](#))
- Kentucky Is First State Granted Approval For Medicaid Work Requirements ([KHN](#))

- Inside The Global Race To Deliver A Vital Radioactive Isotope Used To Detect Cancer ([KHN](#), [New York Times](#))
- Postcard From Sacramento: Alzheimer's 'Looks Like Me, It Looks Like You' ([CHL](#))
- If Poor Neighborhood = Poor Health, Relocation Is One Solution ([KHN](#), [PBS News Hour](#))
- When Food Stamps Pass As Tickets To Better Health ([CHL](#), [NPR](#))
- When You Need A Breast Screening, Should You Get A 3-D Mammogram? ([KHN](#))
- Latest news summaries from the [KHN Morning Briefing](#)

Data and Analysis

The latest in health policy data and analysis from the Kaiser Family Foundation.

- Medicaid and Work Requirements: New Guidance, State Waiver Details and Key Issues ([News Release](#), [Issue Brief](#))
- Medicaid's Role in Addressing the Opioid Epidemic ([Infographic](#))
- Updated Chart Collection: How Does Cost Affect Access to Care? ([Peterson-Kaiser Health System Tracker](#))
- Updated State Data:
 - Status of State Action on the Medicaid Expansion Decision ([State Data](#))
 - Expansion States by Governor's Party Affiliation Map ([State Data](#))
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The Buzz

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Larry Levitt

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Looking ahead, changes in policy like repeal of the individual mandate penalty and work requirements in Medicaid will continue to push the number of uninsured up.

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First Edition

Friday, January 19, 2018

Visit Kaiser Health News for the latest headlines

Today's early morning highlights from the major news organizations.

Kaiser Health News: Podcast: What The Health? Our First Live Show: What The Health Will Happen In 2018?

Congress is at the precipice of shutting down the government, unless lawmakers can quickly agree on another short-term spending bill. And this time, the Children's Health Insurance Program is caught in the crosshairs. Republicans are offering six years of funding for CHIP as an enticement for Democratic votes on the spending bill, but Democrats are still balking because they want the bill to include protections for undocumented individuals brought to the U.S. by their parents when they were children. (1/18)

California Healthline: Judge Orders New Olympus Trial Over Superbug Death

A Seattle judge said Olympus Corp. failed to properly disclose internal emails that raised safety concerns about a redesigned medical scope as early as 2008, several years before the device was publicly tied to deadly superbug outbreaks. Citing those "willful discovery violations" by the Japanese device giant, King County Superior Court Judge Steve Rosen ordered a new trial Tuesday in a wrongful death case brought by Theresa Bigler. (Terhune, 1/18)

California Healthline: Gloves Off, Fists Up: Nurses Storm Capitol To Renew Single-Payer Fight

The nurses are back with their gloves off — and not the disposable medical kind. Despite a legislative setback last year — dealt by one of the state's top Democrats, of all people — the powerful California Nurses Association stormed the state Capitol Wednesday to resume their campaign for single payer health care. (Ibarra, 1/18)

The New York Times: House Passes Short-Term Spending Bill, Setting Up Shutdown Battle In Senate

The House approved a stopgap spending bill on Thursday night to keep the government open past Friday, but Senate Democrats — angered by President Trump's vulgar aspersions and a lack of progress on a broader budget and immigration deal — appeared ready to block the measure. The House approved the measure 230 to 197, despite conflicting signals by President Trump sent throughout the day and a threatened rebellion from conservatives that ended up fizzling. (Kaplan and Stolberg, 1/18)

The Associated Press: Congress Likely Racing Toward A Government Shutdown

A bitterly-divided Congress hurtled toward a government shutdown this weekend in a partisan stare-down over demands by Democrats for a solution on politically fraught legislation to protect about 700,000 younger immigrants from being deported. Democrats in the Senate have served notice they will filibuster a four-week, government-wide funding bill that passed the House Thursday evening, seeking to shape a subsequent measure but exposing themselves to charges they are responsible for a looming shutdown. (1/19)

The Washington Post: House Approves Bill To Keep Government Open As Senate Democrats Take Heat For Threatening To Block It

Senate GOP leaders prepared to force Democrats into a series of uncomfortable votes, aimed at splitting their ranks by pitting moderates from states that Trump won against party leaders and the handful of outspoken liberals considering a run for the presidency. For one, Republicans attached a long-term extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program and delays to several unpopular health-care taxes. The bill does not include protections for "dreamers," immigrants brought to the United States illegally as children or who overstayed their visas as children, a top Democratic priority. (DeBonis, O'Keefe and Werner, 1/18)

The Washington Post: How CHIP Will Be Affected If The Government Shuts Down

If Congress fails to reach a deal to avert a government shutdown at 12:01 a.m. Saturday, federal workers won't be the only ones worrying. Parents of the 9 million children insured through the Children's Health Insurance Program, known as CHIP, are panicking because funding for the program has nearly run out. Republicans in

Congress thought they had a grand solution: They pitched Democrats a deal to do a one-month extension of overall government funding and a six-year extension of CHIP money. But President Trump tweeted Thursday morning that was a bad idea. House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) says he spoke with Trump and the president is now on board, but confusion abounds in the Capitol. (Long, 1/18)

The Associated Press: Government Scientists Scramble To Save Research Ahead Of Shutdown That Could Ruin Studies

The nation's premier medical research institute is in "a scramble" to prepare for a partial government shutdown that could ruin costly experiments and leave sick patients unable to enter cutting-edge studies, Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health said Thursday. Fauci stressed that patients currently in NIH-run studies — including those at the research-only hospital often called the "house of hope" ㄅ 0 wouldn't be adversely affected even if President Donald Trump and Congress don't reach a budget deal to avert a shutdown at midnight Friday. (Neergaard, 1/18)

The Wall Street Journal: Much Of The Federal Government Wouldn't Shut Down In A Government Shutdown

If the federal government shuts down at midnight Friday, much of its work will continue, according to carefully laid plans that have become a familiar part of agency life amid regular political brinkmanship. ... The planned Women's March on the National Mall should be able to go ahead, as the National Park Service says it has special provisions for first amendment activities that require crowd control. (Radnofsky, 1/19)

The Washington Post: Looming Shutdown Raises Fundamental Question: Can GOP Govern?

The federal government late Thursday faced increasing odds of a partial shutdown, the culmination of a long period of budget warfare that has now imperiled what most lawmakers agree is the most basic task of governance. The immediate challenge Thursday was a refusal by Senate Democrats to join with Republicans in passing legislation that would keep the government open for 30 more days while legislators continued to negotiate a longer-term solution. But the impasse raised deeper questions about the GOP's capacity — one year into the Trump administration — to govern. (Paletta and Werner, 1/18)

The Associated Press: Senate Dems Question Legality Of Trump Work Requirements

The Trump administration's new policy allowing state work requirements for Medicaid recipients is legally questionable, more than two dozen Democratic senators said Thursday, framing an argument likely to be aired in court. The senators' letter to acting

health secretary Eric Hargan reads like a memo to legal groups preparing a court challenge on behalf of low-income Medicaid beneficiaries. Last week the administration unveiled its policy letting states to impose Medicaid work requirements, and promptly approved a waiver request by Kentucky to carry out its version. (1/18)

The Associated Press: For Rival Camps In Abortion Debate, A Weekend To Mobilize

Activists on both sides of the abortion debate will be rallying and marching over the next few days in their annual show of force, while looking ahead to the coming year with a mix of combativeness and trepidation. The events kick off Friday with the March for Life in Washington, the biggest yearly event for opponents of abortion. Organizers say Donald Trump will become the first sitting president to address the gathering, speaking live from the White House Rose Garden. (1/18)

The Associated Press: Trump Steps To Forefront Of Anti-Abortion Movement

He once called himself "pro-choice." But a year into his presidency, Donald Trump is stepping to the forefront of his administration's efforts to roll back abortion rights. And though his record is mixed and a midterm election looms, abortion opponents say they have not felt so optimistic in at least a decade. "I don't think anybody thinks that the White House is a perfectly regimented and orderly family ... but that doesn't change their commitment to the issue," said Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony List, which is expanding its door-knocking operation across states with Senate incumbents who have voted for abortion rights. (Kellman, 1/19)

The Washington Post: If Trump Is As Healthy As His Doctor Says, He's Beating Long Odds

If President Trump really is the picture of extraordinary vitality portrayed by the White House physician this week, he is defying long odds, according to experts and medical research. Tuesday's depiction of Trump as much healthier than the average 71-year-old means he is managing to escape the consequences of a lack of sleep, the dangers of significantly elevated "bad cholesterol" and the well-established health effects of obesity, poor nutrition and lack of exercise. (Bernstein and Sun, 1/18)

The Washington Post: Trump Is Targeting Health Workers' Religious Objections. Here's Why.

The Trump administration announced Thursday a new division responsible for handling complaints from health-care workers who do not want to perform a medical procedure like an abortion or assisted death because it violates their religious or moral beliefs, a move that seemed to renew past culture war battles over "conscience protections." The new office, called the Conscience and Religious Freedom Division, is seen by many as

a win for conservative religious groups that complained President Barack Obama's administration did not prioritize religious freedom concerns. Critics, however, worry that the language is broad and could lead to discrimination. (Bailey, 1/18)

The New York Times: Questions And Answers About This Year's Flu Season

At the moment, the 2017-2018 flu season is considered "moderately severe." Large numbers of Americans have fallen ill, and every state except Hawaii has reported widespread flu activity. But some regions have been hit harder than others. More important, the number of people hospitalized or dying from flu nationwide is not unusually high. This season is closely paralleling the 2014-2015 season, which was dominated by the same H3N2 flu strain and was also "moderately severe." (McNeil, 1/18)

The Washington Post: Flu Symptoms 2018: Healthy 10-Year-Old Boy Dies In New York During Harsh Influenza Season

Nico Mallozzi was known for his antics, his sly smile — and his good health. The 10-year-old hockey player from New Canaan, Conn., is depicted in photographs suited up and looking fierce on the ice. His coaches said he "captivated, entertained and kept us on our toes," according to a GoFundMe page. His mother said "he was like an ox" ㄟ 0 strong and never sick. (Bever, 1/18)

The Associated Press: More Than 1,600 New Yorkers Hospitalized For Flu In One Week

A drastic rise in flu cases has hospitalized more than 1,600 New Yorkers in the past week alone, state health officials said Thursday. The Department of Health reported influenza cases rose by 54% over the past week, with new cases diagnosed in all 62 counties, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said in a press release. The governor advised all New Yorkers six months of age and older over who haven't received a flu shot yet to get vaccinated as soon as possible. (1/18)

Modern Healthcare: Health System-Led Drug Company Unlikely To Make A Dent In Drug Prices, Shortages

As four not-for-profit health systems unveiled plans to create their own generic drug company Thursday, experts say they'll face an uphill battle to make a significant dent in one of the fastest-growing industry expenses and persistent problems: rising drug prices and drug shortages. Intermountain Healthcare, Ascension, SSM Health and Trinity Health are working with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to pool their capital and 450 total hospitals to fight back against drug companies that unexpectedly hike the prices of decades-old off-patent generic drugs with minimal competition. They

also look to create a more reliable supply of generic drugs like saline and sodium bicarbonate that are vulnerable to shortages. (Kacik, 1/18)

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The Associated Press: Governors Ask Trump, Congress To Do More On Opioid Crisis

Less than three months after President Donald Trump declared the U.S. opioid crisis a public health emergency, the nation's governors are calling on his administration and Congress to provide more money and coordination for the fight against the drugs, which are killing more than 90 Americans a day. The list of more than two dozen recommendations made Thursday by the National Governors Association is the first coordinated, bipartisan response from the nation's governors since Trump's October declaration. (1/18)

Politico: Trump Again Targets Drug Policy Office, Proposing 95 Percent Budget Cut

President Donald Trump is planning to slash the budget of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, in what marks his administration's second attempt to gut the top office responsible for coordinating the federal response to the opioid crisis. The plan would shift the office's two main grant programs, the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas grant and the Drug Free Communities Act, to the Justice and Health and Human Services departments, respectively, multiple sources in the administration and others working with the government on the opioid crisis told POLITICO. (Karlin-Smith and Ehley, 1/18)

The New York Times: The U.S. Fertility Rate Is Down, Yet More Women Are Mothers

A baby bust. The fertility rate at a record low. Millennials deciding not to have children. There has been a lot of worry about the state of American fertility. Yet today, 86 percent of women ages 40 to 44 — near the end of their reproductive years — are mothers, up from 80 percent in 2006, reversing decades of declines, according to a new analysis of census data by Pew Research Center on Thursday. (Miller, 1/18)

Los Angeles Times: This New Blood Test Can Detect Early Signs Of 8 Kinds Of Cancer

Scientists have developed a noninvasive blood test that can detect signs of eight types of cancer long before any symptoms of the disease arise. The test, which can also help doctors determine where in a person's body the cancer is located, is called

CancerSEEK. Its genesis is described in a paper published Thursday in the journal Science. (Netburn, 1/18)

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NPR: Scientists Edge Closer To A Blood Test To Detect Cancers

There have been many attempts over the decades to develop blood tests to screen for cancers. Some look for proteins in the blood that appear with cancer. Others more recently have focused on DNA from tumors. But these methods alone don't give reliable results. So Nickolas Papadopoulos, a professor of oncology and pathology at the Johns Hopkins Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center, collaborated with many colleagues at the medical school to develop a new approach. It combines two methods into one test. (Harris, 1/18)

The Associated Press: Anti-Smoking Plan May Kill Cigarettes--And Save Big Tobacco

Imagine if cigarettes were no longer addictive and smoking itself became almost obsolete; only a tiny segment of Americans still lit up. That's the goal of an unprecedented anti-smoking plan being carefully fashioned by U.S. health officials. But the proposal from the Food and Drug Administration could have another unexpected effect: opening the door for companies to sell a new generation of alternative tobacco products, allowing the industry to survive — even thrive — for generations to come. (1/19)

The New York Times: Young Women Are Using A.D.H.D. Drugs In Greater Numbers, C.D.C. Reports

The percentage of young adult women who filled prescriptions for drugs used to treat attention deficit disorder has increased more than fivefold since 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported on Thursday. The new report raises questions about the increasing use of a diagnosis that once was reserved for children and adolescents. (Carey, 1/18)

NPR: CTE In Athletes Linked To Hits To The Head, Even Without Concussions

We live in an age of heightened awareness about concussions. From battlefields around the world to football fields in the U.S., we've heard about the dangers caused when the brain rattles around inside the skull and the possible link between concussions and the degenerative brain disease chronic traumatic encephalopathy. (Goldman, 1/18)

Los Angeles Times: Forget Concussions. The Real Risk Of CTE Comes From Repeated Hits To The Head, Study Shows

For more than a decade, researchers trying to make sense of the mysterious degenerative brain disease afflicting football players and other contact-sport athletes have focused on the threat posed by concussions. But new research suggests that attention was misguided. Instead of concerning themselves with the dramatic collisions that cause players to become dizzy, disoriented or even lose consciousness, neuroscientists should be paying attention to routine hits to the head, according to a study that examines the root cause of chronic traumatic encephalopathy, better known as CTE. (Healy, 1/18)

The New York Times: Reproductive Factors In Women Tied To Heart Disease And Stroke Risk

Several female reproductive factors, including early menarche, early menopause and miscarriage, are associated with an increased risk for heart disease and stroke, British researchers report. Between 2006 and 2010, scientists collected data on 267,440 women 40 to 69 years old and followed them for an average of seven years. They found 3,075 cases of cardiovascular disease, 1,635 cases of coronary heart disease and 1,504 strokes. (Bakalar, 1/18)

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First Edition

Friday, February 02, 2018

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Kaiser Health News: Indiana Medicaid Drops 25K From Coverage For Failing To Pay Premiums

As the Trump administration moves to give states more flexibility in running Medicaid, advocates for the poor are keeping a close eye on Indiana to see whether such conservative ideas improve or harm care. Indiana in 2015 implemented some of the most radical changes seen to the state-federal program that covers nearly 1 in 4 poor Americans — including charging some adults a monthly premium and locking out some of those who don't pay for six months. (Galewitz, 2/1)

Politico: Republicans Give Up On Obamacare Repeal

Republicans are giving up on their years-long dream of repealing Obamacare. Though the GOP still controls both chambers of Congress and maintains the ability to jam through a repeal-and-replace bill via a simple majority, there are no discussions of doing so here at House and Senate Republicans' joint retreat at The Greenbrier resort. Republicans doubt they can even pass a budget providing for the powerful party-line "reconciliation" procedure used to pass tax reform last year, much less take on the politically perilous task of rewriting health care laws in an election year. (Everett, 2/1)

The Hill: Right To Try Act Gains Momentum After Trump Pitch

Advocates of "right to try" legislation have been given a jolt of momentum by President

Trump's decision to tout the bill during his State of the Union address. The legislation would allow patients with a serious illness to request access to experimental medicines that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) hasn't yet approved. (Roubein, 2/1)

Stat: Physicians, Ethicists Urge Congress Not To Pass 'Right To Try' Legislation

Dozens of doctors, medical ethicists, and lawyers are warning Congress that legislation to allow Americans with life-threatening conditions access to unapproved, experimental drugs risks harming patients' health. The letter was drafted by Alison Bateman-House, associate professor of medical ethics at NYU Langone Health, along with some of her colleagues. It is addressed to the leaders of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, the committee currently considering a so-called "right-to-try" bill. The letter was circulated for online signatures on Thursday, and organizers said they planned to send the letter on Feb. 5. (Swetlitz, 2/1)

The Hill: Trump's Vows To Take On Drug Prices, Opioids Draw Skepticism

President Trump has pledged to take action to combat the opioid epidemic and reduce drug prices, but one year into his tenure, advocates and industry have grown skeptical of his promises. During his State of the Union speech Tuesday, Trump said one of his top priorities is "fixing the injustice of high drug prices." (Weixel, 2/1)

The Hill: New Group Plans Midterm Spending Against High Drug Prices

A new patient group says it plans to spend seven figures this year backing candidates who support policies to lower drug prices in what it hopes will be a counter to the pharmaceutical industry. The group is called Patients for Affordable Drugs NOW, and is founded by a cancer patient named David Mitchell. (Sullivan, 2/1)

The Hill: Bipartisan Group Of Senators Call On Trump To Boost Alzheimer's Funding

A bipartisan group of senators is calling on President Trump to boost funding for Alzheimer's research in his fiscal 2019 budget set to be released this month. "At a time when the United States is spending more than \$200 billion a year to care for Alzheimer's patients, we are spending less than two thirds of one percent of that amount on research," the letter — led by Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and signed by a dozen others — states. (Roubein, 2/1)

The New York Times: Businesses Look At Washington And Say, 'Never Mind, We'll Do It'

Can private businesses solve public policy problems better than the government? It's a question that has persisted for decades and taken on new resonance now that a career businessman is in the White House. There has never been a clear answer. For every sign of success — a smooth privatized toll road or a gleaming charter school — there

have been obstacles revealing just how difficult public works can be. But companies haven't stopped trying. (Gelles, 2/1)

Reuters: U.S. Government Proposes 1.84 Percent Hike In 2019 Payments To Medicare Insurers

The U.S. government on Thursday proposed an increase of 1.84 percent on average in its 2019 payments to the health insurers that manage Medicare Advantage insurance plans for more than 20 million elderly or disabled people. The proposed rate, which affects how much insurers charge for monthly healthcare premiums, plan benefits and ultimately, how much they profit, was near analyst expectations, and insurer shares were largely unchanged in after-hours trading. (Humer, 2/1)

The Wall Street Journal: Former CEO Of Lab Firm, Two Associates Found Liable For Defrauding Medicare

A federal jury found the former chief executive officer of a Virginia laboratory firm and two associates liable for defrauding Medicare and ordered them to pay more than \$51 million in damages to the U.S. At issue in the civil case tried in a federal court in Charleston, S.C., was \$126.5 million that defendants Tonya Mallory and her associates, Cal Dent and Brad Johnson, earned from a business arrangement the Justice Department deemed illegal. (Carreyou, 2/1)

The Washington Post: CDC To Cut By 80 Percent Efforts To Prevent Global Disease Outbreak

Four years after the United States pledged to help the world fight infectious-disease epidemics such as Ebola, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is dramatically downsizing its epidemic prevention activities in 39 out of 49 countries because money is running out, U.S. government officials said. The CDC programs, part of a global health security initiative, train front-line workers in outbreak detection and work to strengthen laboratory and emergency response systems in countries where disease risks are greatest. The goal is to stop future outbreaks at their source. (Sun, 2/1)

The Washington Post: CDC Employees Are Delighted That Their Acting Director Is Back In Charge

It took several hours Wednesday before employees at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention heard who was going to run the nation's leading public health agency. Brenda Fitzgerald had just resigned after barely six months in the job because of conflicts over financial interests. When the notice finally went out on the CDC's internal announcement board that the principal deputy director, Anne Schuchat, 58, with nearly